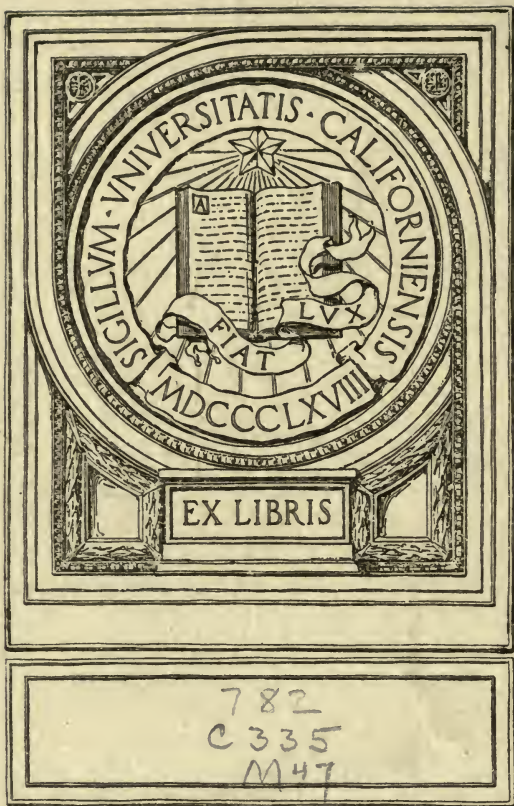


CASANOVA  
AND HIS TIME

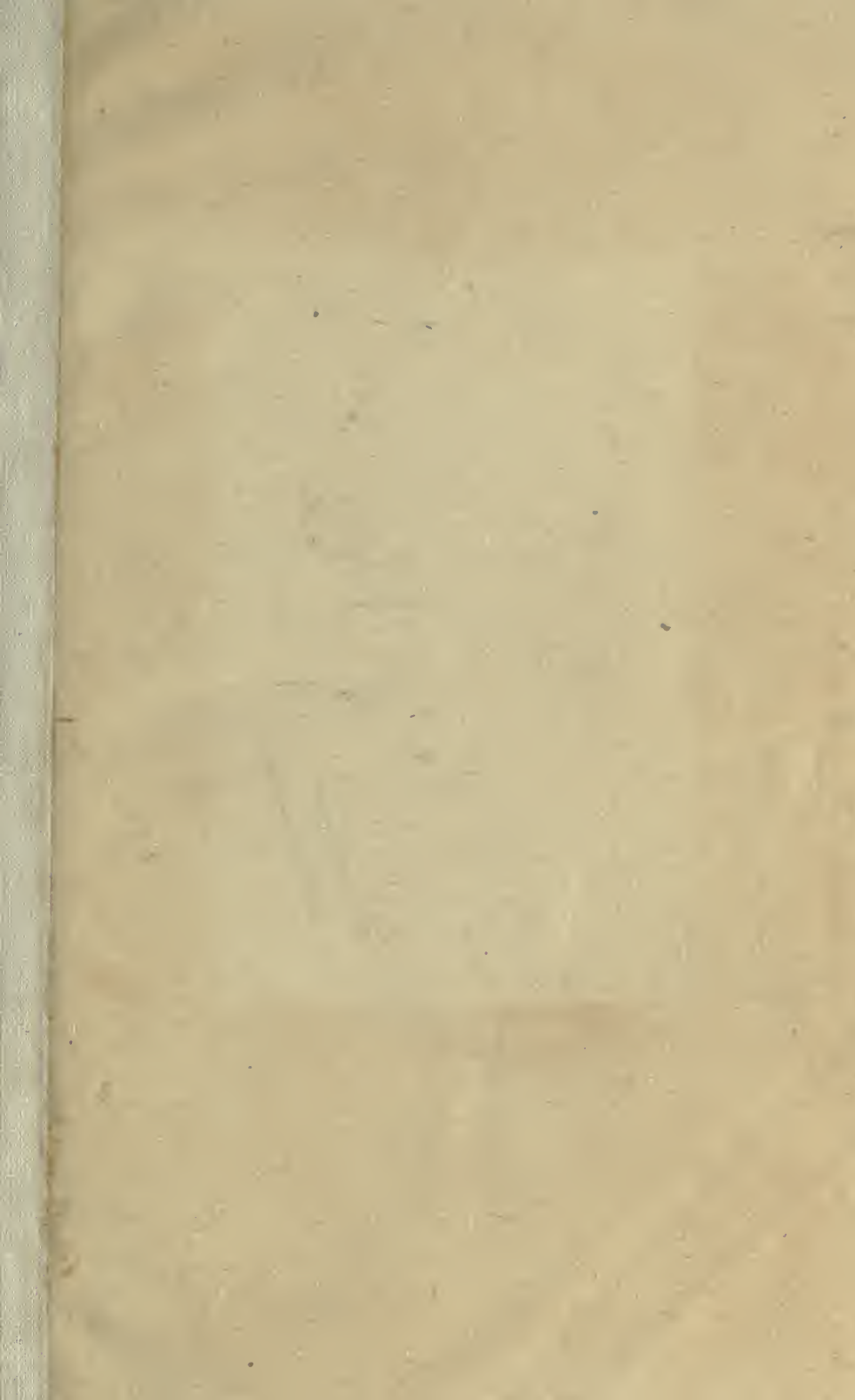
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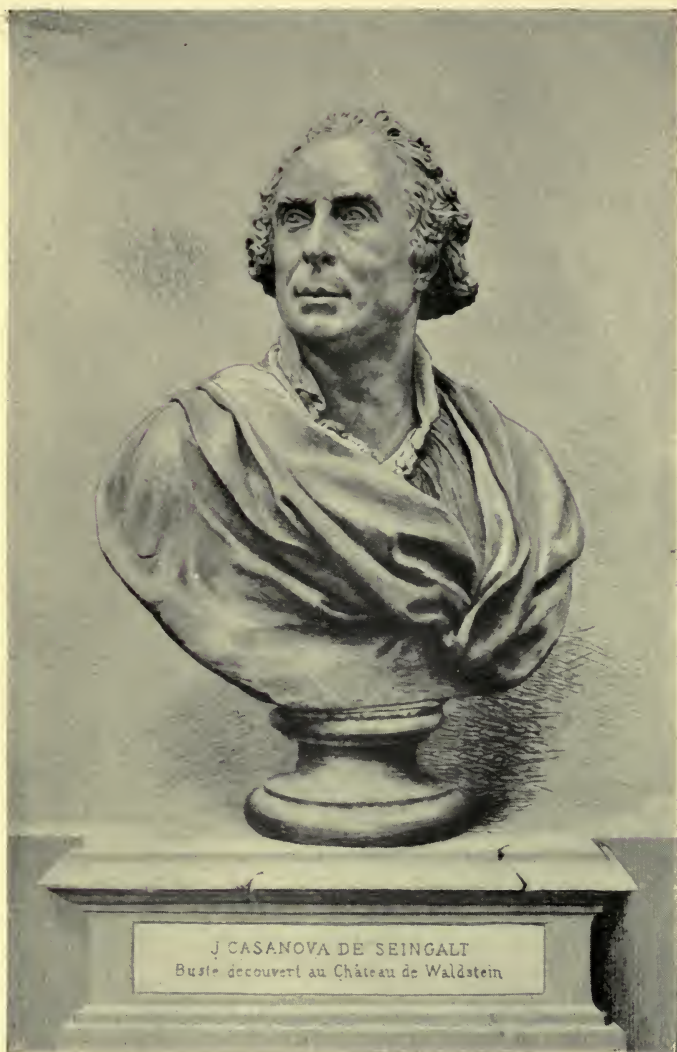
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CASANOVA AND HIS TIME









CASANOVA.

[Frontispiece.]

# CASANOVA AND HIS TIME

BY  
EDOUARD MAYNIAL

TRANSLATED BY  
ETHEL COLBURN MAYNE

LONDON  
CHAPMAN & HALL, LTD.  
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TO  
HENRI DE RÉGNIER  
IN TOKEN OF  
ADMIRATION AND GRATITUDE

252290



## PREFACE

THERE are works, as there are men, which are better than their reputation. The former have been injured by their readers, the latter by their evil company. Casanova's company was of the worst, and for a long time his readers were very nearly to match.

He was read at the age of unhealthy curiosity; the complacently detailed list, with all the names in place, of his *bonnes fortunes*, the tale of his erotic prowess, the bewildering chronicle of his facile loves, served as a pasturage for boyish or senile imaginations. Hence the notoriety which has emblazoned his *Memoirs*. But gradually another kind of curiosity fastened on him—that of research. Men of learning, critics, historians, perceived in this rich tissue of cosmopolitan intrigues and adventures the thread of a genuine destiny; and these have found in the *Memoirs*, not the too-faithful portrait of a professional libertine, but one of those vivid, fresh, original documents which help to construct the history of a whole social epoch.

Much has been written on Casanova's *Memoirs*. A copious bibliography could easily be made of the books,

## PREFACE

articles, and pamphlets which he has inspired. An erudite Dane, M. Tage E. Bull,<sup>1</sup> whom nothing that concerns the Venetian adventurer has escaped, is now engaged in collecting the materials for such a work with equal competence and zeal.<sup>2</sup>

Casanova travelled all over Europe, sowing reminiscences in every capital of the eighteenth century; and so he has “fervents” and friends almost everywhere. There are Casanovists in Copenhagen, and they are to be found in Madrid, Prague, and Constantinople also. But three countries stand out in this bibliographical emulation: Italy, because Casanova was a Venetian; Germany, because he left his manuscripts on German soil; France, because he wrote in French. And three names, three works, stand out too, with clear authority: F. W. Barthold, with his *Geschichtlichen Persönlichkeiten in J. Casanova's Memorien*;<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> We have to thank M. Tage E. Bull for much bibliographical information; will he here accept the expression of our gratitude? M. Tage E. Bull has doubled his kindness by putting us in communication with his no less erudite friend, Dr. Louis Bobé, of Copenhagen, who has with the greatest courtesy made known to us the very rare and curious documents on the sojourns of the Comte de Saint-Germain in Holland and in England, and on the death of that famous charlatan. These documents have been utilised in the first chapter of our book. We offer Dr. L. Bobé our sincerest thanks.

<sup>2</sup> These collaborated labours upon the Casanovian bibliography will shortly appear; they are the result of the co-operation of M. Tage E. Bull, and a learned Venetian, M. Aldo Ravà.

<sup>3</sup> Two volumes, 1846. Reprinted at Berlin in 1864.



## PREFACE

Armand Baschet, with his *Preuves curieuses de l'authenticité des Mémoires de Casanova*;<sup>1</sup> and Alessandro d'Ancona, with his *Aventuriere del Secolo XVIII*.<sup>2</sup> But how many other learned men have brought original research and interesting documents to bear upon this inexhaustible subject! When one has cited the names of Symons in England, of Brockhaus and Ottmann in Germany, of Jules Janin, Loredan Larchey, Charles Henry, Dr. Guède, Octave Uzanne, Malher, and Philippe Monnier in France, of Rinaldo Fulin, Bazzoni, Lanza, Ademollo, Ettore Mola, Malfatti, Belgrano, Masi, Bargellini, Carletta, Corrado Ricci, Frati, Dolcetti, Ravà, in Italy, one has but given a very incomplete idea of this rich bibliography. Through more than half-a-century, the *Intermédiaire des chercheurs* is filled with articles and results of researches on the *Memoirs* of Casanova, and these come from every quarter; in all the libraries and archives of Europe, curiosity is at work, trails are being followed up, unpublished confirmations being discovered of an authenticity which no one any longer dreams of contesting.

Indeed, the essential fact which emerges from all this labour is the documentary value of the work in question, and the very large degree of credence which may be accorded it. Wherever it has been possible to test, on some particular

<sup>1</sup> In *Le Livre*, January, February, April, and May, 1881.

<sup>2</sup> In *La Nuova Antologia* of February 1st and August 1st, 1882.

## PREFACE

point, the narrative in the *Memoirs*, it has been seen that Casanova's sole addition to the facts is his manner of interpreting them. That would be far too much of an addition in an historian; but it is not so in an anecdotist, from whom all we ask is that he shall be a spectator and a listener, with a sense for what is real, and a taste for what is picturesque. Decisive proofs, genuine documents, contributed by Baschet or d'Ancona, have established the author's good faith; when confronted with the most authoritative contemporary witnesses, the work passes the ordeal triumphantly. Little by little we have ceased to look upon this long Odyssey as a tissue of extravagances, brags, and lies. And we have come to admit that if Casanova thoroughly knew himself (as he maintains in the proud motto of the *Memoirs*<sup>1</sup>), he did not less thoroughly know and understand his contemporaries. His least indulgent students grant him this brevet of authenticity. One of them<sup>2</sup> writes: "Let no one be astonished at our here invoking the testimony of this much-decried author. Many recent researches have demonstrated the precision of Casanova's comments upon Italian and French matters. We have found that he was no less exactly informed on Spanish

<sup>1</sup> *Nequidquam sapit qui sibi non sapit. . . .*

<sup>2</sup> M. Morel-Fatio, in the second volume of his *Études sur l'Espagne*, Paris, 1890, p. 43, note 1.

## PREFACE

affairs—that is, of course, on those which were within his range.”

This declaration, among many others, would serve us as an excuse, if we thought we needed an excuse, for the critical studies which we offer to the public, and which, all of them, taking Casanova literally and seriously, follow the text of the *Memoirs* step by step. Some of the most sensational encounters and most piquant adventures of the Venetian worthy have been the source of our inspiration.

There are many different ways of studying Casanova, and doubtless many a page will still be written on his vicissitous destiny. The notorious personages with whom he consorted, the women he loved, exploited, betrayed, and those whom he but just escaped marrying, the towns he traversed, the missions he undertook ; his duels, his prisons, his discoveries ; Casanova as gamester, poet, diplomat, calculator, manufacturer, inventor—in each phase there is matter for research and reflection. “What a book could be written about this rascal ! . . . Why, *now* he’s talking like the hero of a novel ! . . . Oh, upon my word, one ought to follow his itinerary step by step ! ”<sup>1</sup> . . . The genial, cultured dilettante who is made, by the pen of an excellent writer, thus to deliver himself, neither followed the itinerary nor wrote the book—and so much the worse for us. He went only so far as to

<sup>1</sup> In *Le Passé Vivant* of Henri de Régnier.



## PREFACE

sketch the plan, and compose the first scenes, of a five-act historical drama with the alluring title, *La Jeunesse de Casanova*.<sup>1</sup> But eventually some one did arrive, in real life, to carry out his project.

Doctor Guède, who knows Casanova and his *Memoirs* better than any other man in France, *has* actually re-lived the life of our adventurer, *has* followed his trail across Europe—traversing the roads of Italy on foot, as the quarry did, and copying all documents relating to him in the archives. In Venice he too escaped from the Piombi prison, and, by this incontrovertible testimony, reduced Casanova's story<sup>2</sup> to more believable proportions.

At Murano he visited the casino of the Abbé de Bernis, and the site of the convent of beautiful "M.M." At Barcelona he ransacked the archives of the citadel, and verified the names that Casanova cited at the time of his incarceration. At the *Enfants-Trouvés*, in Paris, he found the birth-certificate of a child that the adventurer had placed there.<sup>3</sup> In the archives of the Parisian notaries he rooted out all deeds signed by the Venetian relating to his private affairs, contracts, leases, and inventories.

Unhappily, from this vast inquiry, conducted with equal

<sup>1</sup> H. de Régnier, *Le Passé Vivant*, p. 337.

<sup>2</sup> Dr. Guède considers that Casanova did escape, but in a less romantic fashion, and with the complicity of the nobleman, Bragadin.

<sup>3</sup> See *Intermédiaire des chercheurs*, November 20, 1894, p. 548.



## PREFACE

intelligence and impartiality, public curiosity has reaped so far but small advantage. Dr. Guède has written much and published little. Some articles in the *Intermédiaire*, and the re-editing of a minor work of Casanova, the *Lettre à Snetlage*, are almost all that we have had from him. The rest is still in MS. notes, unpublished. Those whom Dr. Guède honours with his friendship can appreciate the extent of his information, and of his good nature. We have experience of both, and we thank him here very sincerely.<sup>1</sup>

Not every one can, with so scrupulous a conscientiousness, reconstruct the entire career of our adventurer. The following studies are merely detached chapters of the narrative; possibly they may help once again to show what a precious "eighteenth-century document" is that book of Casanova, wherein fantasy, intrigue, and pleasure mingle perpetually into a whirl as giddy as that of any carnival.

<sup>1</sup> It is pleasant to give thanks also to M. Charles Samaran, archivist at the National Archives, who has been kind enough to make some researches for us, and to tell us of some interesting documents.



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<sup>1</sup> Cabalist.



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## CHAPTER I

### AN HISTORICAL ENIGMA: CASANOVA AND SAINT-GERMAIN



# CASANOVA AND HIS TIME

## CHAPTER I

### AN HISTORICAL ENIGMA : CASANOVA AND SAINT-GERMAIN

An historic myth : the Comte de Saint-Germain.

- I. Casanova and Saint-Germain meet at the Marquise d'Urfé's—Two charlatans for a single dupe—The Water of Youth—The royal laboratory—The melting of the diamond.
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- III. Saint-Germain in London—Choiseul's secret—A walk in the Bois de Boulogne—Last encounter of Casanova and Saint-Germain—A hat factory—Death of the Marquise—The two augurs—Death of Saint-Germain.

THE history, or rather the histories, of that brilliant illusionist, the Comte de Saint-Germain, are tempting to the



## CASANOVA AND HIS TIME

ingenious mythographer; and, in fact, Mr. Andrew Lang,<sup>1</sup> in a penetrating and legitimately ironic study, has successfully sought to set forth the pure elements and the precise significance of what may be called a veritable historic myth. There is little to add to his achievement; and in writing here of the Saint-Germain problem, we cherish no hope of completing a legendary lore, already copious enough, and compiled with admirable complaisance and candour by the actual contemporaries of this mysterious personage. By comparing their testimonies, scattered through the memoirs of the time, students have been enabled to follow the genesis and evolution of a legend which, even when reduced to its right proportions, still establishes the fact of a destiny sufficiently enigmatic, and adventures at the least singular. The notable thing in this tale of Saint-Germain, as in those of Cagliostro, Gabalis, and Cazotte, is the extraordinary capacity for credulity and auto-suggestion possessed by an age which was nevertheless one of rationalism and atheism. The co-existence of the scientific spirit with occultism, of the philosophers and encyclopædists with the Rosicrucian Societies and the "Hell Clubs," has often been pointed out as one of the most inexplicable paradoxes of the eighteenth century.<sup>2</sup> In reality, we may not smile over-much at this

<sup>1</sup> In his *Historical Mysteries*, translated by T. de Wyzewa. Perrin, 1907, p. 209, *et seq.*

<sup>2</sup> See particularly Huysmans, *Là-Bas*, p. 364.

## THE COMTE DE SAINT-GERMAIN

anomaly. The wonder rather is that in our own age of elegant scepticism there has not emerged some jocund blade who should resuscitate in flesh and blood, with the complicity of the Many-Headed, the secular Comte de Saint-Germain. A Comte de Saint-Germain responds marvellously to that need to believe in the absurd and inexplicable which lies at the heart of even the most reasonable of men. Every one who approached him in the eighteenth century—or nearly every one—not content with blindly accepting the transmitted legend, worked untiringly at enriching it with new and suggestive details. This is apparent in even the best-informed memoirs.

“Nearly every one.” For there *were* exceptions. And it is precisely one of these that we would signalise in examining the corrections to the Saint-Germain myth which are afforded by the *Memoirs* of Casanova.

Undoubtedly there are many reasons which warn us not to accord to Casanova's *Memoirs*, with regard to Saint-Germain, as in all other matters, anything but a prudently limited credence. Nevertheless, when his text is sifted by learned critics, it has frequently before now (and that to the general surprise) been found to reveal itself as in agreement with historic truth. In studying other incidents in the

## CASANOVA AND HIS TIME

adventurer's career, we shall have occasion to define the kind of documentary interest which may be gleaned from his narratives.

But as concerns Saint-Germain, there are some preliminary reserves to be made. Casanova did not like Saint-Germain; he could not have liked him; and it is easy to divine the reason. These two beings strangely resembled one another, to such a degree that, being as we are in full blast of occultism, people might almost have taken the one for a new incarnation of the other—his “double,” as it were. All through their existence they had identical pretensions, adventures, and “ways of getting there.” Play, women, freemasonry, illuminism, the Cabala, intrigue, the passion for gems, pride of birth though imaginary, of titles though fictitious, the mania for being talked about, and for meddling, without any personal interest to serve, in affairs of State—these are the usual pre-occupations of Saint-Germain, if we are to believe the legend of him; and such were, almost precisely, those of Casanova too, if we are to accept his *Memoirs*. Casanova, then, was bound to detest Saint-Germain, in whom he saw, at the French Court especially, a practitioner more lucky than himself, and in more general fashion, a rival in all those towns of Europe where each displayed his spirit of intrigue and his appetite for notoriety. Their *clientèle* of dupes was the same. There were secrets—







THE COMTE DE SAINT-GERMAIN.

[To face p. 7.]

## RIVALS

secrets of recipes—between them ; and I know not if, like the two augurs of antiquity, they could meet one another's eye without grimacing, but I am certain that they could not encounter in a drawing-room without a guarded gesture of annoyance. At any rate, there were at least two occasions on which it seems clear that the action of the one must have directly impeded the enterprise of the other.

Therefore we must never forget, in reading those chapters of Casanova in which Saint-Germain plays a part, that it is a jealous and malevolent rival who has the word. But such as they are, his comments and his judgments have their value, and it will be interesting to compare them with the other evidence which the eighteenth century has left us.

### I.

It was at the Marquise d'Urfé's that Casanova made the acquaintance of the Comte de Saint-Germain.<sup>1</sup> The first

<sup>1</sup> *Mémoires*, III. 477. The edition cited is that of Garnier, in eight volumes. The Royal Library of Copenhagen possesses a portrait of Saint-Germain, engraved by N. Thomas, *after a picture belonging to Mme. d'Urfé* (1783).

This engraving, dedicated to M. de Thy, Comte de Milly, bears the following legend :—

The Comte de Saint-Germain, famous alchemist :

“ Ainsi que Prométhée il déroba le feu  
Par qui le Monde existe, et par qui tout respire ;  
La Nature à sa voix obéit et se meut :  
S'il n'est pas Dieu lui-même, un Dieu puissant l'inspire.”



## CASANOVA AND HIS TIME

encounter took place at the end of 1757. Casanova was then at the zenith of his career; no check had yet shaken his imperturbable assurance. He had arrived in Paris on January 5, 1757, and had very quickly gained a sort of celebrity in the city, and even at Court, by exploiting the universal curiosity inspired by the resounding tale of his recent escape from the Piombi of Venice. Already he was assuming his chosen attitude of a supernatural being, driven by a secret force—his *genie*, as he loved to say—which was to uphold him throughout all his life.

It was this force, all the more mysterious because it was purely imaginary, which enabled him to obtain so easily the confidence and friendship of the Marquise d'Urfé, that shining type of a crazy great lady, crammed with esoteric knowledge, avid of supernatural colloquies with “elementals,” addicted to the practice of alchemy and the mysteries of magic, immured in her laboratory among her retorts, furnaces, and cabalistic books. Casanova had instantly perceived “a good thing”; the Marquise was the ideal dupe for profitable exercise of his magical mummeries.

We can easily imagine his vexation when, on the very first day, he met at Mme. d'Urfé's, among the already installed familiars, that Comte de Saint-Germain whose reputation was so well known to him. He may well have thought for an instant that his prey was to escape him,

8

## A CRAZY GREAT LADY

that another, more wily than he, and as devoid of scruples, had already snared the bird.

It is to be noted that to this first dinner whereat Casanova and he met, Saint-Germain came in the company of Mme. de Gergi. This detail in the *Memoirs* confirms what we learn elsewhere of that lady's intimacy with the illustrious adventurer. Mme. de Gergi, whose husband had been Ambassador at Venice, declared that fifty years before she had there made Saint-Germain's acquaintance; and she maintained, later on, that he had not changed during that period of time.<sup>1</sup> This remarkable assertion was, indeed, one of those upon which Saint-Germain's devotees based their propaganda regarding the immortality, or at any rate the eternal youth, of their idol.

Despite the irritation caused by this unforeseen encounter, Casanova could not prevent himself from feeling a certain admiration for Mme. de Gergi's companion. He admits that Saint-Germain talked, at table, with an ease and charm which captivated him, and that this dinner was the pleasantest he had at the Marquise d'Urfé's. Doubtless there was mingled with this admiration a good deal of curiosity and no little amazement: Casanova, who piqued himself on never being surprised at anything, and on continually surprising others,

<sup>1</sup> See the *Mémoires* of Mme. du Hausset (Collection Barrière, III. 106).

## CASANOVA AND HIS TIME

had found his master. The loquacity and the bragging of this rival filled him with enthusiasm. And, in fact, it was always surprising, even to the most sceptical, to see and hear Saint-Germain for the first time, especially at table. He never tasted of any dish, no matter how savoury or delicate; doubtless the more perfectly to maintain his faculty of dazzling the company by that supernatural eloquence which had won him his earliest fame, doubtless also from a sort of superstitious fear of poison, in a society where he could not feel himself to be entirely safe from jealousies and vengeance. Whatever the reason, he used frankly to declare that his life depended upon his diet, and that nobody else could know the sort of food that suited him. Entrenched behind this pretext, he talked unwearyingly, while the silent company did honour to the repast.

On this occasion Saint-Germain was in his best form, and astounded Casanova by revealing to him several circumstances about himself which the author of the *Memoirs* has not neglected to set down. In this way he informs us that the famous Count said he was three hundred years old, "that he had the Great Panacea, that he did what he pleased with Nature, that he had the secret of melting diamonds, so that from ten or twelve small ones he could make a large one of the first water, without losing a particle of their weight. All these operations were for him

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LOUIS XV.

[To face p. 11.]



## DAZZLING ROGUES

mere trifles. . . . He had got into favour with Mme. de Pompadour, who had obtained for him an interview with the King; and he had made a charming laboratory for that gracious monarch, who was always bored, but who hoped to get some amusement, or at any rate to relieve the tedium of his mind, by dye-making. His Majesty had given him an apartment at Chambord, and five hundred *livres* for the construction of a laboratory; and, according to Saint-Germain, the King, by his chemical productions, was going to bring much prosperity to the factories of France.”<sup>1</sup>

It is true that, in the interval, Casanova recovers himself, and, while acknowledging his amazement at Saint-Germain’s “gift of the gab,” loudly proclaims his own scepticism: *he* is not the dupe of this man; he regards him as an impostor, sees through his “rhodomontade, his evident lies, and his blazing discrepancies.” But despite it all, despite his jealousy and distrust of his rival, there persists a certain sympathy born of admiration and envy. Saint-Germain amuses him, and in that sense pleases him; he commends his good looks, his tone of decision, his universal knowledge, his supple intelligence. And, moreover, Saint-Germain, like Casanova himself, had the supreme

<sup>1</sup> *Mémoires*, III. 478.

## CASANOVA AND HIS TIME

last touch of being able, in his public, to distinguish the dupes from the accomplices, and of proportioning his fanfaronades to the degree of his audience's credulity. Throughout long hours of dazzling talk, he would pour forth, with exquisite skill, supernatural details, mysterious confidences, fantastic comments; then, carelessly, perceiving that he had brought his hearers to the utmost limits of their complaisance, he would let fall some modest little precept which reduced his chimerical science to the right proportions of good sense. The most intelligent of those who observed him at close quarters—and Casanova is one of them—saw through this trick, and they have not failed to point it out to us. Saint-Germain (the Venetian said) had the candour and the modesty to recognise that certain of the miraculous doings attributed to him were factitious: for example, he knew that he could not give back their youthfulness to women, as he permitted to be said of him—and in reality contented himself with “keeping them in whatever state he found them,” by means of certain paints, precious unguents, or that magic water of which he held the costly secret.

A similar admission is reported by Mme. du Hausset, the waiting-woman of Mme. de Pompadour, who took down carefully, and as she affirms, at the moment, every little detail of a conversation which she one day overheard between the

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## FAMILIAR PERSONAGES

favourite and the adventurer.<sup>1</sup> In the course of this dialogue, Saint-Germain, yielding to his habitual mania, began to speak, with much facility and wit, of Francis I., Mary Stuart, and Marguerite de Valois, as of personages who were familiar to him, and whom he had intimately known. Mme. de Pompadour laughingly pointed out to him the incredibility of what he was implying. Upon which he said: "I have a good memory, and I have studied the history of France. . . . Sometimes I amuse myself, not by *making* people believe, but by *letting* them believe, that I have lived in the most remote periods." And in the same way, when she rallied him on the confidences of Mme. de Gergi, who maintained that she had known him fifty years before in Venice, and that he had not changed in that somewhat lengthy interval, he gently gave her to understand that the good lady was doting.

Thus, before certain persons—before Mme. de Pompadour, to whom he owed the King's confidence, before Casanova, in whom he discerned a rival—Saint-Germain did not fear to descend from his tripod, and would genially display the basis of his magic power, just as a talented conjurer will magnanimously reveal to a few privileged ones his secret trickeries.

<sup>1</sup> *Mémoires* of Mme. du Hausset, pp. 106, 107.



## CASANOVA AND HIS TIME

Far from avoiding Saint-Germain, whom he did admire a little, though he did not like, but nevertheless keeping well on his guard, Casanova seems for a while to have sought out opportunities of seeing him—the more so because he now felt sure enough of Mme. d’Urfé, whose credulity he had captured, and whose feeble judgment he had enslaved, to dread no longer the rivalry of another charlatan. He was now Sorcerer-in-Chief, fully accredited, in her household, and he consented to admit thereto a competitor who had ceased to be dangerous. One evening, with some friends, he met him at Passy during a concert given by M. de La Popelinière, and on this evening was again captivated by the humour and wit of the impostor. But he saw him oftenest at the Marquise d’Urfé’s, for he had expressed a desire to dine as frequently as possible with this amusing guest. One evening,<sup>1</sup> though, these happy relations were imperilled. Saint-Germain must have been in higher spirits or less on guard than usual, for during dinner, where he alone ate nothing and talked much, he carried his bragging so far that Casanova frankly laughed in his face. For what did the fellow do but relate, with the greatest gravity, an adventure he had had when “dining with the Fathers of the Council of Trent”! Mme. d’Urfé, to avert the storm, drew attention to a magnet she wore round her neck, like

<sup>1</sup> *Mémoires*, IV. 47, *et seq.*

## A BREEZE

a jewel. But Saint-Germain must needs declare that he was capable of increasing the magnet's power a thousandfold. Casanova, who was great at betting and at contradicting, coolly wagered twenty thousand crowns that the thing was impossible. Heaven knows what might have happened if the Marquise had not interposed, and forbidden the wager. She herself seemed to believe in the sovereign power of Saint-Germain; but there was nothing surprising in that; and Casanova, calming down, and more sagely reflecting, was careful not to prove her wrong.

This little breeze, of which he curtly tells us, induces Casanova to recur to what he had already said of Saint-Germain some chapters before, and to give us some wider information about the adventurer's situation at the French Court, and the divers reasons for his prestige. All this part of the *Memoirs*<sup>1</sup> repeats in almost identical terms, but with more detail, that which we analysed above;<sup>2</sup> there would even be, in the comparison of the texts, material for an interesting study regarding the composition of the book.

Here are the three precise points upon which Casanova insists. First: that it was the Marquise de Pompadour who interested herself in Saint-Germain, and made him

<sup>1</sup> Vol. IV. Chap. II., in the Garnier edition.

<sup>2</sup> Vol. III. Chap. XIX.

## CASANOVA AND HIS TIME

known to the King, "in the hope of giving him a taste for chemistry." Saint-Germain arranged for His Majesty, at Trianon, a laboratory where Louis XV. amused himself with puerile experiments, between two hunting-parties. On his side, the King gave Saint-Germain an apartment at Chambord, the same that he had formerly accorded to the Maréchal de Saxe, and a hundred thousand francs, "that he might freely work at obtaining dyes which should assure to the cloth-factories of the kingdom a superiority of colour over those of all other countries."

In the second place, Saint-Germain had given to the favourite that "Water of Youth" which had the virtue, not of restoring youthful freshness and health to such as had lost them, but of preserving them until death in their then condition.

Finally, the impostor is affirmed to have persuaded Louis that he was capable of melting several small diamonds into one large stone.

Let us examine, one by one, these three points, and see how they accord with what we know of truth or probability from other sources. As regards the intervention of Mme. de Pompadour between Saint-Germain and the King, Casanova's assertion seems to us beyond doubt. It is confirmed by the narrative of Mme. du Hausset, from which we have already made some quotations. The

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## A STATE LABORATORY

adventurer was very assiduous with the favourite, who was amused by him, and who, at this time, was on the search for every possible expedient to distract the royal boredom and retard her own disgrace. She probably saw in this subtle intriguer a useful auxiliary, capable of fixing for a moment, by means of his agreeable talk, his superficial knowledge, and the renowned strangeness of his destiny, the unstable curiosity of Louis XV. Had she not, ten years before, conceived the idea of that theatre of the Petits-Cabinets, which long occupied and amused the Court? And after that, after music, dancing, and hunting, and the alternative period of more invidious complaisances, why should not the King be inspired, thanks to Saint-Germain's complicity, with a fancy for chemistry? Moreover, at a time when the financial embarrassments of the kingdom were causing the most piteous apprehensions to all the royal following, and even, despite his apathy, to the King himself, this notion of a State laboratory, where there should be prepared miraculous dyes, destined to double the profits of the official manufactures, was neither more foolish nor more chimerical than many other expedients.

We shall not dwell long upon the "Water of Youth." The pretensions of Saint-Germain and the actual limits of his powers, are sufficiently familiar from all that has been written, both of absurd and of reasonable, on the subject.

## CASANOVA AND HIS TIME

But we must consider for a moment the perfidious commentary which Casanova makes upon this detail. The water, he says, had effectually operated, if not on the *physique*, at any rate on the mind of the favourite: "she had assured the monarch that she *felt* she would grow no older." There can be no probability of Mme. de Pompadour's having been duped by the magic recipe; her frank raillery of the charlatan and of Mme. de Gergi's assertions are sufficient proof that her credulity took a good deal of finding. But that she may have tried to imbue the King, who asked for nothing better than to be imbued, with confidence in the infallibility of the "Water of Youth," is not only probable, but is confirmed by everything we know of her relations with him in 1757. The incurable restlessness of the King's ennui, which so alarmed Mme. de Pompadour, grievously clear-sighted as she was, had a profounder cause than satiety with the same pleasures. The favourite was aging: at thirty, she was no longer the seductive and overbearing woman who had subjugated the master's caprice. The terrible fatigues of Court life had exhausted her; already the Abbé de Bernis could write in a private letter: "Our fair friend can no longer scandalise any but fools and knaves. It is notorious that, for the last five years, gallantry has given place to friendship."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> On all this, see De Nolhac, *Louis XV. et Mme. de Pompadour*, chap. vi.



MME. DE POMPADOUR.

[To face p. 18.]





## THE TWO DIAMONDS

Bernis perhaps exaggerates a little ; at any rate, he deceives himself when he affirms that the King's detachment was "notorious." Appearances were saved. But who knows? Saint-Germain's marvellous water—the infallible water which had at least captured the credulity of the foolish Comtesse de Gergi—might work a similar miracle on the unaccountable humour of the King. Mme. de Pompadour may well have indulged the dream.<sup>1</sup>

Again, the swindle with the diamonds belongs to the category of realised facts. It is known that Saint-Germain piqued himself on removing flaws from diamonds without making them lose in weight. On this subject, Mme. du Hausset relates in perfect good faith a characteristic anecdote.<sup>2</sup> It offers a good deal of resemblance to the one which Casanova has noted, and it may possibly be the same fact, slightly altered in passing from mouth to mouth among the crowd of devotees who loved to amplify and enhance the miracles of the charlatan. This twelve-carat diamond

<sup>1</sup> On the subject of this drug, M. Tage E. Bull sends me the following curious information : "Saint-Germain's famous *arcanum*, made of an extract of senna-leaves, is the only thing which keeps his memory alive in the minds of men. All the apothecaries in Denmark still sell it—in ever-lessening quantities, it is true, for the days are long gone by in which the Landgrave of Hesse-Cassel paid a physician of Schleswig, one Dr. Lossau, the sum of 1200 rix-dollars (more than 5000 francs) a year, solely for preparing the Saint-Germain medicaments."

<sup>2</sup> *Mémoires* of Mme. du Hausset, p. 107.



## CASANOVA AND HIS TIME

which, according to Casanova, Louis XV. showed one day to the Duc des Deux-Ponts, and which he asserted that he had made, under Saint-Germain's tutelage, by melting twenty-four carats' weight of small stones, is bewilderingly like the flawed diamond which Saint-Germain himself, if we are to credit Mme. du Hausset, transformed into a stone of the purest water, and of twice the value.

The interested infatuation of the favourite, the chemical experiments of the idle sovereign, the "Eau de Jouvence," and the miraculous diamonds—each of these details, stated and registered by Casanova, accords absolutely with all that is most assured and least debatable in the congeries of facts around which the Saint-Germain legend has crystallised. And the testimony of the Venetian, by no means an excessively friendly witness, valuably corroborates the essential features of the legend. Nor is this all; for, by a coincidence well-nigh as marvellous as the destiny of the impostor, Casanova was mixed up with all the notable events of his career, and we are once more to behold, on a fresh battleground, these two subtle rogues engaged in conflict with one another.

### II.

Between his first and second meeting with Saint-Germain at Mme. d'Urfé's, Casanova had been absent for some time

## NEGOTIATIONS

from Paris on a journey to Holland; and it is important, for the explanation of what follows, that we should here recall the causes and circumstances of this trip.

We know that Casanova had long since forced himself into the friendship, somewhat distant and haughty on the victim's side, of the future Cardinal de Bernis, and that it was thanks especially to him that he had contrived to approach Mme. de Pompadour and gain access to the Court of Louis XV. By the advice of the banker, Corneman, with the support of Bernis, the consent of M. de Boulogne, *Contrôleur-Général*, and the favour of Choiseul, Casanova now conceived the idea of negotiating in Holland, in the name of the King of France, a loan of twenty millions. The precise method of procedure was to induce either the States-General, or a private Dutch company, to accept Royal bills for the sum of twenty millions, and to buy in exchange the paper of some other Power whose credit was more stable than that of France, and whose bills could therefore be more readily negotiated.<sup>1</sup> It is true that a state of open war then prevailed, and that French finances were at a low ebb. But, with interested optimism, M. de Boulogne declared that peace was merely a question of time, and that this assurance should inspire confidence on the Bourse of Amsterdam.

All elate with his mission, Casanova made his farewells to

<sup>1</sup> *Mémoires*, III. 486.

## CASANOVA AND HIS TIME

Mme. d'Urfé, and reached The Hague by way of Antwerp and Rotterdam. He says that he was preceded by a letter of recommendation from Choiseul to M. d'Affry, French Ambassador at The Hague, who was to assist him in his negotiations.<sup>1</sup> This essential detail is probably veracious, as Armand Baschet has established in his masterly study entitled *Preuves curieuses de l'authenticité des Mémoires de Casanova*.<sup>2</sup> The relations between the adventurer and the Resident at The Hague, at the end of 1757 and beginning of 1758, are attested by the official letters of d'Affry, preserved in the archives of the Foreign Office.<sup>3</sup> These letters give some information about the extraordinary personage whose boastful talk and dubious manners had, as we shall see further on, set the Ambassador on his guard. Such an attitude on his part appears but slightly in the *Memoirs*, and, in default of any other detailed testimony, we must after all give credence to Casanova's story of these negotiations. He does not fail to boast of the favourable reception and genial treatment which he enjoyed at the French Embassy. Assisted by d'Affry, who would have duly warned him against the Jewish bankers, and counselled by an influential merchant of Amsterdam, M. d'O.,

<sup>1</sup> *Mémoires*, 486, 490.

<sup>2</sup> In *Le Livre*, January, February, April, and May, 1881. See pp. 20, 23.

<sup>3</sup> Dutch Series, for the year 1758.



## CASANOVA TRIUMPHANT

whose friendship he won by wooing his daughter, the beautiful Esther, and whom he further fascinated by the omnipotence of his cabalistic knowledge, Casanova arrived, after lengthy parleys and many critical moments, at negotiating the French paper. The *Contrôleur-Général*, trusting imperturbably in the approaching peace, would not hear of letting it go under a security of 8 per cent.; the Jew Boaz offered Casanova 18,000,000 worth of stock in the *Compagnie des Indes Suédoises*. M. d'O. advanced him 18,200,000 francs, of which 10,000,000 were money down; but without any brokerage for himself. Casanova, who assumes the air of a generous victim, writes to Choiseul urging him to accept this last proposal; he hopes, moreover, that the Court will take into consideration the disinterestedness he has shown, and will recoup him for his expenses. At last the business is done, and Casanova comes back to Paris, triumphant, on February 10, 1758.<sup>1</sup>

This glory, dazzling as it must have been, was of short duration. After having received the felicitations of Mme. de Pompadour, of Bernis, Choiseul, and M. de La Popelinière, Casanova too soon perceived that he had been duped, or at any rate he gives us so to understand. No one would believe that he had not pocketed a handsome commission in Holland for the business which he had brought to fruition. At

<sup>1</sup> See *Mémoires*, III. 490-511; IV. 1-36.

## CASANOVA AND HIS TIME

Court, they were particularly sceptical, and the *Contrôleur-Général*, with an ironic smile, refused to acknowledge his claims.<sup>1</sup>

In reality, Casanova had *not* returned with empty pockets. He had done a lucky stroke of business for Mme. d'Urfé; this, and the counsels of his patron, M. d'O., who had drawn him into some fruitful operations, had enriched him. And since, precisely at that time, as a consequence of events which it would take too long to relate, he was beginning to hate the Paris sojourn—menaced as he was in his personal safety, and repelled by the ingratitude of the Court—he now turned his face again to Holland, where he had left such good friends and such complaisant dupes. A new project for a loan—of which he spoke with Choiseul<sup>2</sup>—was to serve as a pretext for a second visit. And so, behold Casanova once more *en route* for Holland, on December 1, 1759, twenty-two months after his triumphal return.

When he went back to Holland, was Casanova really entrusted, as he was the first time, with an official mission? The question has its importance, in view of the events which are to follow. Unfortunately, it is not easy to elucidate. Casanova certainly says<sup>3</sup> that Choiseul had suggested to him that he should negotiate a loan of 100,000,000 florins at

<sup>1</sup> *Mémoires*, IV. 43.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, IV. 155.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, IV. 43.



## ONCE BIT . . .

4 per cent., and that he asked to be allowed to think it over. Later, on the eve of leaving Paris, he goes to see Choiseul again,<sup>1</sup> and reverts to the proposal. This time it is a question of a loan at 5 per cent., and the Minister promises to write again to d’Affry. But Casanova has not made up his mind. In the first place, circumstances seem to him unfavourable for a transaction of this kind. The peace, in which Ministers believed or affected to believe so early as 1758, was still as problematical as ever at the end of 1759, though Choiseul was unchangingly confident. If, in the operations of the year, the French had seemed to regain an advantage in the Continental War, they had suffered at sea several irremediable and resounding defeats. The effect of these on the credit and finances of the nation could not be doubtful. Moreover, Casanova bears a grudge against the Court for its poor repayment of his past services, and he seems little disposed to work for honour alone this time. All these considerations have made him cautious; thus, when he arrives at The Hague, he shows himself more eager to rejoin M. d’O. and the beautiful Esther in Amsterdam than to enter into negotiations with the bankers, merchants, and great companies.

About this second voyage to Holland there is, however, some one who can inform us in terms less high-flown, or

<sup>1</sup> *Mémoires*, IV. 154.

## CASANOVA AND HIS TIME

more disinterested, than Casanova himself; and that some one is d'Affry. We are fortunate in possessing letters exchanged, from September 29 to October 15, 1759, between Choiseul and the French Resident at The Hague; and these will help us to define the circumstances surrounding this vague mission. They have been published by Armand Baschet, and we shall here give a brief analysis, and some fragments, of them.

In the first place, it was the Vicomte de Choiseul who, on September 29, 1759, asked of his relative, the Duc de Choiseul, a letter of recommendation for Casanova to d'Affry. The terms in which this request is made are notable: "The *Sieur de Casanova (sic)*, a Venetian and a man of letters, has been for some time travelling for the purpose of instructing himself in literature and commerce. He intends to start immediately for Holland, and, *despite the kindness which M. d'Affry showed him last year*, he would like to have a letter of recommendation from M. le Duc de Choiseul to that Minister."<sup>1</sup> We have italicised the notable phrase in which the Vicomte de Choiseul alludes to the former relations of Casanova with d'Affry: it is a valuable testimony to the facts which we have already stated on the authority of the *Memoirs*.

Next, on this same date, September 29, the Duc de

<sup>1</sup> *Archives des Affaires étrangères* (Dutch Series, 1759).

## CASANOVA'S MISSION

Choiseul writes to d'Affry: "The Sieur de Casanova, a Venetian, *who is already known to you*, Sir, proposes to revisit Holland, where he has already experienced your kindness in the course of an earlier visit. You know that he is a man of letters whose object is to perfect his information, *especially on the subject of commerce*, and I am well persuaded that you will accord him your good offices on any occasion which may lead him to have recourse to them. I shall take it as a personal favour if you will be so kind as to grant him a friendly reception."<sup>1</sup>

In this singular note, we find the same allusion to the former relations of Casanova and d'Affry. On the other hand, it is disappointing to discover in it no clear definition of the mission with which the Venetian says he was charged. Are the words, "*especially on the subject of commerce*," which we have italicised, to be taken as a discreet avowal of that mission? In such a matter, if it were concerned with negotiations or loans, always delicate material on account of the deplorable condition in which French credit then was, it would have been difficult for a Minister to be any more explicit.

Well, invested or not invested with an official mandate, we find Casanova once more at The Hague, and in a good position, as we have just seen, to renew amicable relations

<sup>1</sup> *Archives des Affaires étrangères* (Dutch Series, 1759).



## CASANOVA AND HIS TIME

with the French Ambassador. And it is in these circumstances that, by a veritable *coup-de-théâtre*, Saint-Germain reappears upon the scene.

Casanova had barely alighted at the Prince d'Orange Hotel at The Hague, when he made inquiries about his fellow-guests. He learnt that Saint-Germain was lodged under the same signboard, and would eat at the same table.<sup>1</sup> Without, at the moment, troubling himself about this personage, Casanova went to call upon d'Affry, who received him cordially, but warned him that he would have some trouble in successfully renewing such an operation as he had already brought off, for the credit of France was now completely ruined by the deplorable administration of the *contrôleur* Silhouette.

That is Casanova's version. There is another, which is historic, and which, again, we owe to our Foreign Office archives.

After having seen the Venetian whom Choiseul commended to him in such urgent fashion, d'Affry wrote to the Minister, on October 15, 1759, a long letter which we cannot quote in its entirety, but of which these are some of the essential points : The Ambassador has the best reasons for distrusting Casanova ; this person, on his first visit, had been presented to him by M. Kauderbach, for whom the youthful Comte de Brühl, nephew of the Prime Minister,

<sup>1</sup> *Mémoires*, IV. 159.

## D'AFFRY ALARMED

had given him a letter. But Casanova had offended deplorably in many ways—he had chattered at random about his personal adventures and about the French Court; he had been considered “indiscreet in his comments,” and it had been necessary to call him to order, “when he tried to extend them further than to the territory of Venice.” Later, it had come to be known that at Amsterdam he had led a very dissipated life and had squandered large sums of money at play. When he had left for Paris, it had chanced that two Venetians, who were passing through The Hague, spoke of their compatriot, at the Embassy, in anything but eulogious terms, dwelling freely upon his Parisian adventures.

D’Affry’s prudence was then alarmed. And when he saw Casanova return, preceded by a warm recommendation from the Minister, he had felt at once surprised and uneasy. Had Choiseul’s confidence been played upon? To what degree did the Venetian deserve the kindness shown him by the Duke, or had he received anything like the degree of that kindness to which he laid claim? The Ambassador writes directly to the Minister for information, and through his letter we see two different apprehensions pierce sharply—that of committing a blunder by displeasing the master, and that of being the dupe of an adventurer.

Incidentally, we at last learn something about Casanova’s mysterious negotiations. The Venetian, pressingly questioned,



## CASANOVA AND HIS TIME

admits that he has come to negotiate papers. "I told him," writes d'Affry, "that I hoped he had not come to Holland to get French papers into discredit, and that, as he knew the intrigues of this place, he must surely understand that the drop in our papers was nothing but an artifice of the usurers, who discredited them only to lower prices and make their own profit out of buying them. He admitted the truth of that, and told me that *the principal object of his visit was to see if, in Amsterdam, he could not realise some Swedish paper which he had sent there. He seemed to me on the whole very frivolous in his manner, or else very adroit in hiding from me his real reason for coming here.*"

These two last phrases are remarkable. The latter indicates plainly that d'Affry scented some secret mission, doubtless unknown to Choiseul, in the presence of this strange *envoyé*; the other, without explaining very precisely the operations of Casanova, gives us to understand that he really had some project in his head. It is to be noted, in this connection, that in the somewhat confused account which the *Memoirs* give us of these financial operations, there is frequently referred to a transaction with the *Compagnie des Indes Suédoises*.<sup>1</sup>

To d'Affry's letter Choiseul replied, as one would

<sup>1</sup> *Mémoires*, IV. 2.

## D'AFFRY SHUTS HIS DOOR

expect, that it was the Vicomte de Choiseul who had recommended Casanova to him, that he himself did not personally know him, and that the Ambassador would do well to shut his door against such an intriguer.

Doubtless it was done, and the reader will not be astonished to hear that the *Memoirs* are dumb upon the close of their author's friendly relations with d'Affry. However, those relations did not terminate before the Ambassador had talked with Casanova of another personage, at least as suspect as he—and that personage happened to be the Comte de Saint-Germain. As we have no testimony but Casanova's own on this important point, we might well question the reality of this interview. But why should not d'Affry, while showing marked frigidity to the Venetian, have interrogated him, before his dismissal, upon the doings and personality of the mysterious charlatan? After all, Casanova came from Paris, he had lived at the Court, on the edge of the official world, he had approached the Ministers, of whom one at least seemed to have admitted him to intimacy. In the heart, then, of the baffling intrigues whereof Versailles was the centre, he might have been able to unravel something; did he not himself hold one of the threads of that secret diplomacy which served to amuse the unemployed monarch and the capricious favourite? Anxious above all not to compromise himself, the Ambassador considered that every

## CASANOVA AND HIS TIME

witness, no matter how bad his character, was worth questioning, and that all information, no matter how untrustworthy, was useful to pick up. That was why, though keeping Casanova at a distance, d’Affry concerned himself to ask, carelessly and as if by chance, whether he knew a certain Comte de Saint-Germain, who had lately arrived at The Hague. Here we must quote textually the Ambassador’s words, as Casanova reports them—

“I have never seen the man at my residence, though he says that he is charged by the King to borrow a hundred millions. When I am asked for information about him, I am obliged to answer that I do not know him, *for I fear to compromise myself*. You perceive that such an answer from me must necessarily injure his negotiations ; but that is his fault, not mine. *Why has he not brought me a letter from the Duc de Choiseul, or from Mme. la Marquise ?* I believe that the man is an impostor ; but in a few days I shall know something more about him.”<sup>1</sup>

Casanova, who until then knew not a single thing about Saint-Germain’s secret operations, was not a little surprised and vexed at once more finding in his path this rival, this possible competitor, who might impede him were he, despite d’Affry’s counsel, to feel inclined to attempt a fresh financial combination. Therefore he hastens, with moving frankness,

<sup>1</sup> *Mémoires*, IV. 160.



## THE MEETING

to repudiate Saint-Germain, whom he represents to the Ambassador as an equivocal and dangerous being; nor does he omit any details he knows about the curious existence of the adventurer—in short, he and d’Affry have a diverting chat over the pretensions of Saint-Germain and the royal credulity.

But on returning to the hotel, he thinks over this surprising encounter. What is the famous Count, whom he had believed to be solely occupied with alchemy and magic doing at The Hague? Can he really be entrusted with a secret commission? Had the *Contrôleur-Général*, finding himself, Casanova, insufficiently docile for this newly projected business, entrusted it to another agent, without Choiseul’s knowledge? Resolute to relieve his mind, Casanova, directly he enters the hotel, sends up his name to Saint-Germain.

“You have forestalled me,” says this gentleman, on seeing him enter; “I was going to call on you. I imagine, my dear Monsieur Casanova, that you have come here to do something for our Court; but you will find it difficult, for the Bourse is scandalized by the recent transaction of that lunatic, Silhouette. *Nevertheless, I hope that this mischance will not prevent me from finding one hundred millions.* I have given my word for it to Louis XV., whom I may call my friend, and I shall not disappoint him; in three or



## CASANOVA AND HIS TIME

four weeks my business will be finished.”<sup>1</sup> Casanova, a little naïvely, expresses astonishment that he has not seen d’Affry. “I have no use whatever for him,” replies the other. “Probably I shall not even see him once.” He will not go to the Court either; he will see no one, but leave for Amsterdam as soon as possible. There his credit will enable him to find the money that he has promised to the King.

That is the first act of the comedy. This is the second. Some days later, Casanova and Saint-Germain are both to be found at Amsterdam; but they do not see one another. Casanova is wholly absorbed in his love for the fair Esther, and in his cordial relations with her father, M. d’O., whose friendship becomes ever warmer and more active, and who consults him—him and his famous oracle—about all his undertakings. One evening, M. d’O. puts this mysterious question to the oracle: “I want to know if the individual who invites me and my company to handle an affair of great importance is really the friend of the King of France?”<sup>2</sup> Casanova, who has no great trouble in divining the *individual* to be Saint-Germain, and who can make his oracle say what he will, replies by means of magic letters that the impostor must be denied, and this suspicious business refused. M. d’O. then gives more ample information about

<sup>1</sup> *Mémoires*, IV. 161.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, IV. 196.

## SAINT-GERMAIN FLEES

the proposal that had been made to him : it is an affair of disbursing a hundred millions with the Crown diamonds for security. "*It is a transaction which the King wished to arrange without his Ministers' interference—indeed, without their knowing anything whatever about it.*"<sup>1</sup>

Thanks to the intervention of the ingenious Casanova, Saint-Germain therefore fails in his dark negotiations. And that is the second act. The *dénouement* does not tarry.

Some days after this conversation between M. d'O. and Casanova, the French Ambassador demands from the States-General, in the name of the King his master, the extradition of the "Sieur Comte de Saint-Germain."<sup>2</sup> The States-General consent. But when the police authorities presented themselves, at midnight, at the Hotel of the Etoile d'Orient, where the "Sieur Comte" was staying, they found the bird flown. Saint-Germain had left, travelling post, at nightfall, by the Nimeguen road. As a matter of form, some horsemen were despatched at his heels, but with no hope of catching him up. D'Affry had acted too late, doubtless by reason of calculated delays on the part of the Court. Later it became known that Saint-Germain had passed through Emden, and had embarked for England, leaving as a pledge in M. d'O.'s hands what he had said to be one of the Crown diamonds. It was afterwards found

<sup>1</sup> *Mémoires*, IV. 197.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, IV. 199.

## CASANOVA AND HIS TIME

to be a false stone. This took place about Christmas-time in the year 1759.

How much truth is there in all this, to enlighten us upon the mysterious destiny of the adventurer? One might answer: It is nearly all true. For another source, and one of generally admitted accuracy, enables us to verify on this point the narrative of Casanova. This source is the *Souvenirs* of the Baron von Gleichen, successively envoy from the Margrave of Bayreuth, and Danish Ambassador in Paris, who lived for some time in close relations with Choiseul.<sup>1</sup> I do not know that the Baron von Gleichen, who published

<sup>1</sup> E. and J. de Goncourt published, in their *Portraits intimes du dix-huitième siècle* (pp. 489-496), some letters of the Baron von Gleichen, found at the Biblioteca of Parma. In one of these letters, which is probably of January 6, 1768, and is written from Paris to Paciaudi, Librarian to the Duke of Parma, Gleichen speaks in these terms of Choiseul: "*My way of life here is very pleasant. In the transits of the Court, I meet the court-circle. . . . M. and Mme. de Choiseul are what they have always been, my protectors, the tutelary divinities of their friends, and the most respectable beings whom I know. . . .*" Since we are concerned with Saint-Germain and Casanova, we owe it to truth to add that Gleichen himself had some affinity with the two strange charlatans who mystified their age. The Abbé Barthélemy, announcing a visit from him to Mme. du Deffand, thus depicts him: "He is a sort of adventurer, who goes from land to land, trading on his graces and his wit, and when he has gained all hearts in a town or a castle, he leaves them incontinently, and goes somewhere else" (E. and J. de Goncourt, *Portraits intimes, etc.*, p. 489, No. 1). Finally, to finish this portrait, we must record that the Baron von Gleichen adored Italy and the Italians, and that he was, for his day, an accomplished connoisseur and collector of antiquities, graven stones, bronzes, bas-reliefs, and mosaics.



## AN IMPOSTOR

some *Essais Théosophiques*, and was much addicted to the various chimæras of the time, may not be suspected of a soft corner in his heart for Casanova. At all events, he has solicitously retraced for us a notable episode of that agitated existence, and it is precisely his account of the Dutch occurrences which is about to serve us as a proof of the authenticity of Casanova's *Memoirs*.

Before comparing the two texts, we may ask ourselves if Casanova completely understood the facts of which chance had made him a witness, or if he did not allow himself to distort them in the relating. According to him, the mission with which Saint-Germain said he was charged in Holland was purely financial, not political at all. But it goes without saying that the financial jugglery, with its fantastic detail of the Crown diamonds, is the sheerest fable. Not d'Affry, who suspected the imposture, nor M. d'O., who nearly became the victim of it, nor Casanova, who unmasks and narrates it, was taken in by the bluster of the illustrious braggart. In reality, Saint-Germain, despite his gift of the gab and his divers juggleries, lacked the fascination necessary to impose upon minds less simple than those of Mme. de Gergi or Mme. d'Urfé.<sup>1</sup>

One thing, then, seems likely: Saint-Germain was in Holland at this period on the business of the French Court,

<sup>1</sup> See G. de Nerval, *Les Illuminés*, p. 227.



## CASANOVA AND HIS TIME

and his mission was a secret one, for d’Affry was not informed of it, and, moreover, the adventurer surrounded himself with mystery, carefully avoiding the Ambassador and every other sort of official personage at The Hague.<sup>1</sup> But this money-hunt, which he avowed, was nothing but a pretext intended to cover a darker enterprise. The pretext was well devised, considering prior events and the financial embarrassments wherein Louis XV.’s Court was then struggling. As to the real undertaking, it is not very difficult to discover.

Every one knows what a large part secret diplomacy played, during the eighteenth century, in the relations of France with the other Powers. We are to-day acquainted, thanks to divers publications and especially to the books of the Duc de Broglie, with the existence, the agents, and the negotiations of that personal policy which King Louis XV. directed from the heart of his palace, unknown to his Ministers and official Ambassadors. Saint-Germain was one of these occasional agents, and was for some time mixed up in the contraband negotiations. There is nothing surprising in the King’s having made use of so dubious a confidant; it is impossible to be squeamish about such jobs, and the worst rogues did wonderfully well at them. Saint-Germain, who, if we are to believe the *Memoirs* of

<sup>2</sup> *Mémoires*, IV. 161.

## SECRET DIPLOMACY

Grosley,<sup>1</sup> had mysterious acquaintances in Holland, emerged naturally enough as the man of the moment.

Alongside the personal diplomacy of Louis XV. there ran a second secrecy, or rather counter-secrecy, which Belle-Isle had organised, with the complicity of the King and the support of Mme. de Pompadour. Naturally Choiseul was kept out of these doings; and it is not very likely that de Broglie, the ordinary agent of the King, was let into the secret, since no trace of these facts is to be found in the family papers.

The Baron von Gleichen relates in his *Souvenirs* that the Maréchal de Belle-Isle had conceived the idea of negotiating a private peace with Prussia, and breaking the alliance between Austria and France upon which Choiseul's credit was founded. Saint-Germain was the tool of the Marshal, whom he had known in Germany and who had been his sponsor at the Court of Louis XV. Thanks to this support, he managed to persuade the King and Mme. de Pompadour to send him to the Duke of Brunswick, whose intimate friend he said he was, at The Hague. The King consented.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Grosley relates in his *Memoirs* that Saint-Germain had had relations with a lady as enigmatic as himself, who lived luxuriously in Holland upon unknown resources.

<sup>2</sup> *Souvenirs de Charles-Henri baron de Gleichen*, published by Paul Grimblot, Paris, 1868, octavo, pp. 130-132. There exists an anterior German edition, without author's name: *Denkwürdigkeiten, eine Reihe*

## CASANOVA AND HIS TIME

Behold, then, Saint-Germain caught in the somewhat tangled web of the pseudo-diplomacy of France. It must be confessed that he did not shine in his initial effort—too arrogant and too boastful to keep silent at the right moment, too sure of success to act quickly. First at The Hague, then at Amsterdam, he heaped blunder on blunder. D’Affry scented something; Choiseul was warned, and addressed to the King, in the Cabinet Council, a respectful but vigorous reproof. As always, the King listened, and, sooner than confess, sacrificed his accomplice. A demand for extradition was sent to The Hague. But the States-General, who hated a fuss, managed so that Saint-Germain was apprised in time. The rest we know.<sup>1</sup>

Such are the essential facts to which the fable of the diamonds and the loan reduces itself. What date must we assign to these events? Casanova’s *Memoirs* answer, the end of December, 1759. And this assertion is confirmed by two historical ratifications: the mission of Saint-Germain to Holland, certainly anterior to the year 1761, which saw the death of Belle-Isle, must be placed also prior to the month of June, 1760, for we find at that date, in a London journal, a sort of interview with the adventurer.<sup>2</sup>

*aus seiner Feder geflossenen Aufsätze über Personen und Verhältnisse aus der zweiten Hälfte des 18<sup>ten</sup> Jahrhunderts.* Leipzig, 1847. See pp. 118, 119.

<sup>1</sup> On Saint-Germain’s flight, see *post*, p. 259.

<sup>2</sup> See Andrew Lang, *Historical Mysteries*, p. 227, and our Appendix I.



## SAINT-GERMAIN IN ENGLAND

It was, then, at the end of 1759, or beginning of 1760, that Saint-Germain achieved the prudent retreat from Holland to England which we have related.

### III.

We shall not accompany Saint-Germain in his hasty flight, since Casanova was not in England at the same time. He had himself just set out for Germany. This year 1760 marks, for the author of the *Memoirs*, the beginning of a new period of European roving, fertile in incidents of every kind. Germany, Switzerland, Savoy, Provence, Italy, successively beheld him, always effervescent, always (at this time) occupied solely with love and gambling, and everywhere enjoying life with inexhaustible gusto. In 1761 (in the spring, it would seem) he appears again in Paris. And it was during a short stay there, before departing again for Strasbourg and Munich, that he once more came in contact with the luckless *re-escaped* one of Amsterdam !

We have no information about the existence of Saint-Germain in England, between his flight from Holland and his return to Paris. The only text which attests his presence in London is that interview published by an English journal shortly after his arrival.<sup>1</sup> But we may

<sup>1</sup> Andrew Lang ; and see also Appendix I. of this book.



## CASANOVA AND HIS TIME

recall here a little-known fact which explains the curiosity of the British public, and the very particular solicitude with which the English police authorities thought it well to watch their troublesome visitor. This was not the first time that Saint-Germain had set foot upon the hospitable soil of England. He had already sojourned there between 1743 and 1745, as plainly appears from a letter of Horace Walpole published by Mr. Andrew Lang.<sup>1</sup> It is true that this text gives us but vague information about our adventurer; the usual fables which surrounded his enigmatic personality are dished up again without any wealth of detail; but we do learn that Saint-Germain was to have been arrested in London, in December, 1745, as suspect of connivance with Charles Stuart. It is regrettable that there has not been found, to this day, any document in the English archives bearing upon this arrest and the circumstances of the intrigue. But if the fact is authentic, it completes the physiognomy of the gentleman, and, joined to the Dutch occurrences, presents a sort of "unpublished" Saint-Germain, in the guise of an international agent for the "jobs" of diplomatic busybodies.

At any rate, on his second visit to London fifteen years later, he was the subject of a close surveillance, justified by his past intrigues; and this surveillance, if we are to believe

<sup>1</sup> This letter is of December 9, 1745.





THE DUC DE CHOISEUL.

[To face p. 43.]

## EXPULSION FROM ENGLAND

Casanova, led to his expulsion from England a little time after his flight from Amsterdam.<sup>1</sup> Casanova explains this expulsion in his own way, which is somewhat obscure, and his account can be accepted only with the greatest reserve. According to him, Saint-Germain was in London in the position of the Duc de Choiseul's spy.<sup>2</sup> Let us translate this: as a counter-spy of the King's spies, as an agent charged with the watching and counterbalancing of Louis XV.'s secret diplomacy. The Dutch adventure, the demand for extradition made by d'Affry at The Hague, were merely (still according to Casanova) an ingenious comedy arranged by the Ministry to take in England, by openly disqualifying a man whom, later, it was intended to use for a delicate and mysterious mission. But the English Ministers were not taken in; they expelled Saint-Germain, and he came back to Paris, where Casanova and Mme. d'Urfé met him one afternoon in the Bois de Boulogne.<sup>3</sup>

That Choiseul had established, in the Courts where the King and his *côterie* had their intrigues, a regularly organised counter-system of espionage, is extremely probable. That the enigmatic Saint-Germain was used by him, in London, in such a capacity, seems to us much more debatable. It is difficult to imagine that he would have thought of employing a man

<sup>1</sup> *Mémoires*, V. 362.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, V. 366.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, V. 363.



## CASANOVA AND HIS TIME

so manifestly in the pay of Mme. de Pompadour and the Maréchal de Belle-Isle. Choiseul detested Saint-Germain; he loathed his juggleries and boastings to the extent of making a public scene with his Duchess, who was undergoing the treatment, and following, for rejuvenating purposes, the magic prescriptions of the charlatan.<sup>1</sup> Hence our view of the obscure London episode is that it was a natural consequence of the Dutch one: unmasked in Holland, Saint-Germain went to England, and there pursued the intrigue begun by the King, the favourite, and Belle-Isle to negotiate a peace in spite of the Minister—pursued it until the day whereon, in England too, he was found out and given his marching-orders. *That*, we believe, is the sense in which Casanova's gossip must be accepted, when he declares that he saw the famous Count again in Paris in 1761.

Nor was that to be their last encounter. Three years went by.<sup>2</sup> Meanwhile, Casanova had again left Paris and resumed his peregrinations through Europe; had made a long stay in London, and brought away from it some bitter memories;<sup>3</sup> had left England precipitately, and

<sup>1</sup> Andrew Lang, *Historical Mysteries*.

<sup>2</sup> The last interview of Saint-Germain and Casanova was certainly not earlier than March, 1764. See *Mémoires*, VII. 60.

<sup>3</sup> See *The Episode of La Charpillon*, p. 215 of this book.

## THE LAST ENCOUNTER

sought refuge on the Continent from the detestable consequences of his amorous escapades. We find him at Tournai, where he stayed twenty-four hours before going on to Brussels. It was during this short pause that chance, with singular persistence, once more confronted him with the Comte de Saint-Germain. And this supreme interview is perhaps the most characteristic of them all.

As we read it, we gather that Saint-Germain had, at this moment, still further thickened the sheltering mystery with which he loved to surround himself. Did he again desire to pass unperceived by too clear-sighted eyes? Was he carrying on in solitude some unavowable intrigue? Or was he merely acting the favourite old comedy of artifice and grimace, which had already served him so well? One knows not. At any rate, Casanova had some difficulty in approaching him. He had noticed, on the road from Dunkirk to Tournai, some superb horses being exercised by grooms, and had been told that they belonged "to M. le Comte de Saint-Germain, the adept."<sup>1</sup> It was added that though the horses were freely offered up to public curiosity, that was by no means the case with their master, who lived in the most inaccessible seclusion and refused to receive any one whatever. No more was needed to inflame the curiosity and pique the vanity of Casanova, who was always excited by difficulties

<sup>1</sup> *Mémoires*, VII. 71.

## CASANOVA AND HIS TIME

and undiscouraged by the sternest rebuffs. He wrote to the Count, and asked for an audience. Here is the reply—

“My occupations oblige me to receive no one, but you are an exception. Come at whatever hour suits you best; you will be conducted to my room. You will not need to mention either my name or your own. I do not offer you the half of my dinner, for my food could suit no one, and least of all *you*, if you still preserve your old appetite.”<sup>1</sup>

All these precautions, unless they were designed solely to impress his “clients,” seem to indicate clearly that Saint-Germain was not feeling particularly safe at that time. Anyhow, they stirred the Venetian’s curiosity, and he hastened to the door which was so closely defended. The “adept” appeared—strangely appparelled in an Armenian robe and a pointed cap; a long beard flowed down to his girdle, and he held a little ivory wand in his hand. The decorations of the room were to match: it was a complete sorcerer’s and alchemist’s interior—retorts filled with various elixirs standing in rows upon the sand-strewn floor, furnaces, long glass tubes. But Casanova, who had seen many similar dens, was not much impressed. He asked the mage to what he was now consecrating his genius, and learnt that

<sup>1</sup> *Mémoires*, VII. 71.



## DEATH OF MADAME D'URFÉ

he was working at the chemistry of colours, by way of a pastime, and that he was organizing a hat-factory, which was to be financed by the Comte de Cobentzel, Austrian Ambassador at Brussels. This was not the first time that Saint-Germain had forsaken alchemy for chemistry, or apparently so, for doubtless he applied the methods of the one to the other. The reader will remember that he had interested Louis XV. in the fabrication of dyes, and created a laboratory where wondrous tints were prepared for the official manufactories. It would be idle to discuss the real value of these enterprises; but it is necessary to record them, for they were one of the customary means employed by the impostor to insinuate himself into the favour of the great, who, by his parade of valueless knowledge, were led to conceive the fantastic hope of enriching either themselves or the State.

The conversation then fell upon the Marquise d'Urfé. The good lady had just died—poisoned, it was supposed, by some magic drug.<sup>1</sup> That was at any rate the opinion of Saint-Germain, who said to Casanova: “She poisoned herself by taking too big a dose of the ‘panacea’. . . .” And then murmured, so that the other should hear, “Ah! if she had listened to *me*. . . .” But Casanova was not desirous of letting the conversation take this turn; with regard to Mme.

<sup>1</sup> *Mémoires*, VI. 451.



## CASANOVA AND HIS TIME

d'Urfé's death, he felt it necessary to be rather cautious. This is not the place to relate in any detail the long comedy which he had played with the ductile and visionary lady ; but it is well to point out that by Casanova's own testimony, Mme. d'Urfé, dying at seventy-three, had definitely declared herself to be pregnant of a supernatural child in whom she was to live again.<sup>1</sup> Now, had not this absurd belief been patiently inculcated in her by the Venetian? He had at first made her hope that he would regenerate her by transforming her into a young boy conceived of him by the virgin daughter of an adept ; then, after a preliminary failure, he had changed the method, and declared that her pregnancy would be by the stars. She was to die before being brought to bed, and finally be born again of her own volition after seventy-four days. This whole imposture and the ludicrous manœuvres ensuing from it are narrated with remarkable effrontery in the *Memoirs*. It is scarcely necessary to add that Casanova, so prompt to laugh at Saint-Germain and his eternal youth and his "Eau de Jouvence," did not take himself any more seriously, and was here concerned merely with the certainty of acquiring the affection of a rich and generous woman. The good lady's nephew, who publicly declared some years later that

<sup>1</sup> Consult also, on this point, the *Souvenirs* (apocryphal) of the Marquise de Créqui.

## A SECRET UNDERSTANDING

Casanova was a swindler, and had got more than a million out of the Marquise, was probably not exaggerating. In any case, our adventurer, despite his assurance, was not anxious to unfold himself to Saint-Germain on the precise conditions of the death and its preceding circumstances; and allowed him, unprotesting, to declare that the operation which had been attempted on Mme. d'Urfé was not only a possible, but, delicate though it was, a safe one, and that *he*, Saint-Germain, would have been able to bring it off. This is one of the occasions when the two augurs, by a secret understanding, kept their eyes sedulously turned away from one another, lest they should imperil their sacerdotal gravity.

Thus did Saint-Germain reveal himself at this Tournai interview—alchemist, chemist, magician, and, in addition, an officious if not a skilful doctor. Casanova had not left England without bringing away a troublesome reminder of his stay there; he was suffering from an ailment on the nature of which it is unnecessary to dwell. Saint-Germain, who offered to treat him, gave him some pills and a sort of white liquid which he called the "*Universal Archeus*," or "*atoéther*."<sup>1</sup> The remedies were accompanied by an enigmatic recipe, and some fooleries which did not impress the patient:

<sup>1</sup> *Mémoires*, VII. 72. ("Archeus" means "the all-formative vital principle which constitutes, according to certain alchemist philosophers, the *anima mundi*, or soul of the world.")

## CASANOVA AND HIS TIME

for Casanova gives us to understand that he shunned the cure.

Finally, to send his visitor away in a correct state of awe, the charlatan finished with one of his best tricks. Using nothing but a metal plate, a tube, and some burning coals, he rapidly transformed a twelve-sous piece into a gold one. Casanova says that the coin was genuine, but maintains that he was not duped by the cunning sleight-of-hand. Then the two adventurers parted. They were never to see one another again. One would say that, by an odd caprice of destiny, these two men, so well fitted to understand one another, if not to act together, met always at the most significant hours of their lives. The few precise and almost accredited facts which emerge from the obscure history of the one are mixed up with the other's career in a very remarkable manner: upon Saint-Germain's sojourn at the Court of Louis XV., upon his problematical mission to Holland, upon one of his stays in London, the *Memoirs* of Casanova afford us some fresh documents which certainly must, it would seem, be reckoned with.

For a long time the manner of the enigmatic Count's death was as secret and disconcerting as his life. His best biographers lost sight of him from the moment of his flight from Holland to England in 1760, and restricted themselves to conjecturing, from evidence more or less trustworthy, that

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## WHERE DID SAINT-GERMAIN DIE ?

after having for some time pursued his adventurous career across Russia, Germany, and Italy, he settled down in the Landgraviate of Hesse, where he was said to have died between 1780 and 1785.<sup>1</sup> The obscure problem has been definitely solved in an irrefutable document published by Dr. L. Bobé, in his edition<sup>2</sup> of the *Voyage de Lavater en Danemark*. It appears from the burial-book of the town of Eckernförde that Saint-Germain died there on February 27, 1784, and was buried quietly, on March 2, in the Church of St. Nicholas.

That puts an end to all the disputes and all the hypotheses—from the somewhat vague affirmation of Fr. Bülau,<sup>3</sup> who makes Saint-Germain die about 1770 in the Landgrave of Hesse's house, to the testimony of Casanova, which we have still to examine. In terminating his narrative of the supreme encounter with Saint-Germain, whom he was never to see again, Casanova declares: "This was the last time that I saw the learned and famous impostor : *he died six or*

<sup>1</sup> See particularly Andrew Lang, *Historical Mysteries*. We think it worth noting here that Grosley maintained that he had seen Saint-Germain again in the prisons of the Revolution, and that Saint-Germain had an imitator in the facetious Major Fraser, who, under the July Monarchy, declared that he had known Nero and conversed with Dante. Grosley's affirmation rests on no serious proof; as to the legend of Major Fraser, we think it idle to discuss it.

<sup>2</sup> *Johann Caspar Lavaters Rejse til Danmark i Sommeren*, 1793. Copenhagen, 1898, pp. 156-159.

<sup>3</sup> *Geheime Geschichten und räthselhafte Menschen*.



## CASANOVA AND HIS TIME

*seven years ago at Schleswig.*"<sup>1</sup> Now the *Memoirs* were written between 1791 and 1798, which would place the death of Saint-Germain between 1784 and 1791. Only a very small point is needed to bring this assertion into relation with the truth. The event would have taken place, *not in the town of Schleswig, but in the Duchy of Schleswig* at Eckernförde; and the date implied by the text of the *Memoirs*, 1784, fits exactly with that authenticated by the burial-book of the town.<sup>2</sup>

Thanks to the ingenuity and patience of students, the mystery has been dispelled—a mystery which extended to the very death of a man whom many had approached, whom some had seen familiarly, but whom none had known or understood. But we have been anxious to show that with regard to a new chapter of that existence, and not the least important one, Casanova's testimony is found to accord with a document of the archives.

<sup>1</sup> *Memoires*, VII. 73. In another edition of the *Memoires*, that of Rosez (Brussels, 1871), whose text presents numerous divergences from that of Garnier, we find (Vol. VI. p. 79): "I afterwards heard that the celebrated charlatan had died in Silesia." We shall not linger over this new version, which strikes us as a printer's error for Schleswig. It will be seen that the second text is less positive and less detailed than the first.

<sup>2</sup> According to documents and oral traditions obligingly communicated to us by M. Tage E. Bull and Dr. Bobé, we learn that Saint-Germain's memory was long kept green in Schleswig and Eckernförde. The populace was absolutely convinced of his immortality, and he was believed to have

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## CASANOVA'S RANCOUR

Such, analysed and interpreted as impartially as may be, are Casanova's reminiscences of Saint-Germain. One note dominates them, and that is (once the passing curiosity with regard to so dazzling a reputation had gone by), an unconcealed malevolence, even a sort of rancour, against the too lucky impostor. Did we call it, just now, trade-jealousy? rivalry? distrust? One knows not precisely which. But it is evident that Casanova has set himself to destroy, point by point, the glamorous legend that Saint-Germain had woven around his own personality. For the Saint-Germain myth existed in its subject's lifetime; we must never forget that fact. The charlatan's poses, all his sayings and doings, were not merely a comedy played to astonish and deceive. Plainly he desired to baffle curiosity, to falsify, even to its smallest details, the truth about an existence which is verified by none of those precise little points which usually illuminate the most humble destinies. Nobody has ever known, for example, where, when, and of whom Saint-Germain was

been seen at Schleswig, dressed as usual, in the funeral procession of his friend and patron, the old Landgrave of Hesse, who died in 1836. M. L. Bobé heard the following from a still living witness, His Highness Prince Hans of Schleswig-Holstein-Sonderburg-Glücksbourg, grandson of the Landgrave and brother of the late King of Denmark, Christian IX. Prince Hans, born in 1825 (and then aged eleven years), was present at the obsequies of his father. He saw the personage in question, and believes there was some confusion with the Comte de Rochambeau, a French *émigré*, whose origin is as obscure as Saint-Germain's. On Saint-Germain's sojourn in Schleswig, see our Appendix I.

## CASANOVA AND HIS TIME

born ; and nobody ever seems likely to know. Casanova, be it said, is dumb on the point, and echoes none of the strange fables which already circulated in the contemporary salons as to the adventurer's origin.<sup>1</sup> We have just shown that the end of his life was as long-debated and mysterious as the beginning. On the incidents which developed between these two uncertain terms, only suppositions are available. Those of Casanova are as reliable as any ; and we have carefully recorded them wherever they serve to support those which are better known.

Confronted with a personage who had entered living, not merely the domain of history, but of legend, most of his contemporaries either admired or were scared. But Casanova resists and criticises. That doubtless arose, as we pointed out at the beginning of this study, from the fear of a redoubtable competitor ; we may explain such systematic hostility by the fact that the connection between the two adventurers was entwined round Mme. d'Urfé. *She*, easy dupe, amiable visionary, brought the pair together, and thenceforth he who could best exploit her generosity and credulity was concerned to keep the other at a distance, by unmasking his knaveries. Moreover, Casanova's animosity

<sup>1</sup> The most accredited of these made Saint-Germain to have been born about 1706, and gave him for mother the Princess Marie de Neubourg, wife of Charles II. of Spain ; the father was said to have been a Portuguese Jew.



## CASANOVA AS MORALIST

against Saint-Germain is not exceptional; in general, it extends to all those fortune-hunters and amorous prowlers in whom the eighteenth century was so prolific. Each time that he comes across one of them, he either shuns him, or slaughters him with a phrase: Cagliostro is an "arrant rogue,"<sup>1</sup> a "do-nothing genius";<sup>2</sup> the Chevalier Goudar a "notorious roué who lives by play and intrigue;"<sup>3</sup> the Marquis Don Antonio della Croce an adventurer and a sorry fellow.<sup>4</sup> Why should Casanova, who so complacently sets himself up as a judge, and even as a moralist, have been any more indulgent towards the Comte de Saint-Germain?

<sup>1</sup> *Mémoires*, VIII. 305.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, VIII. 13.

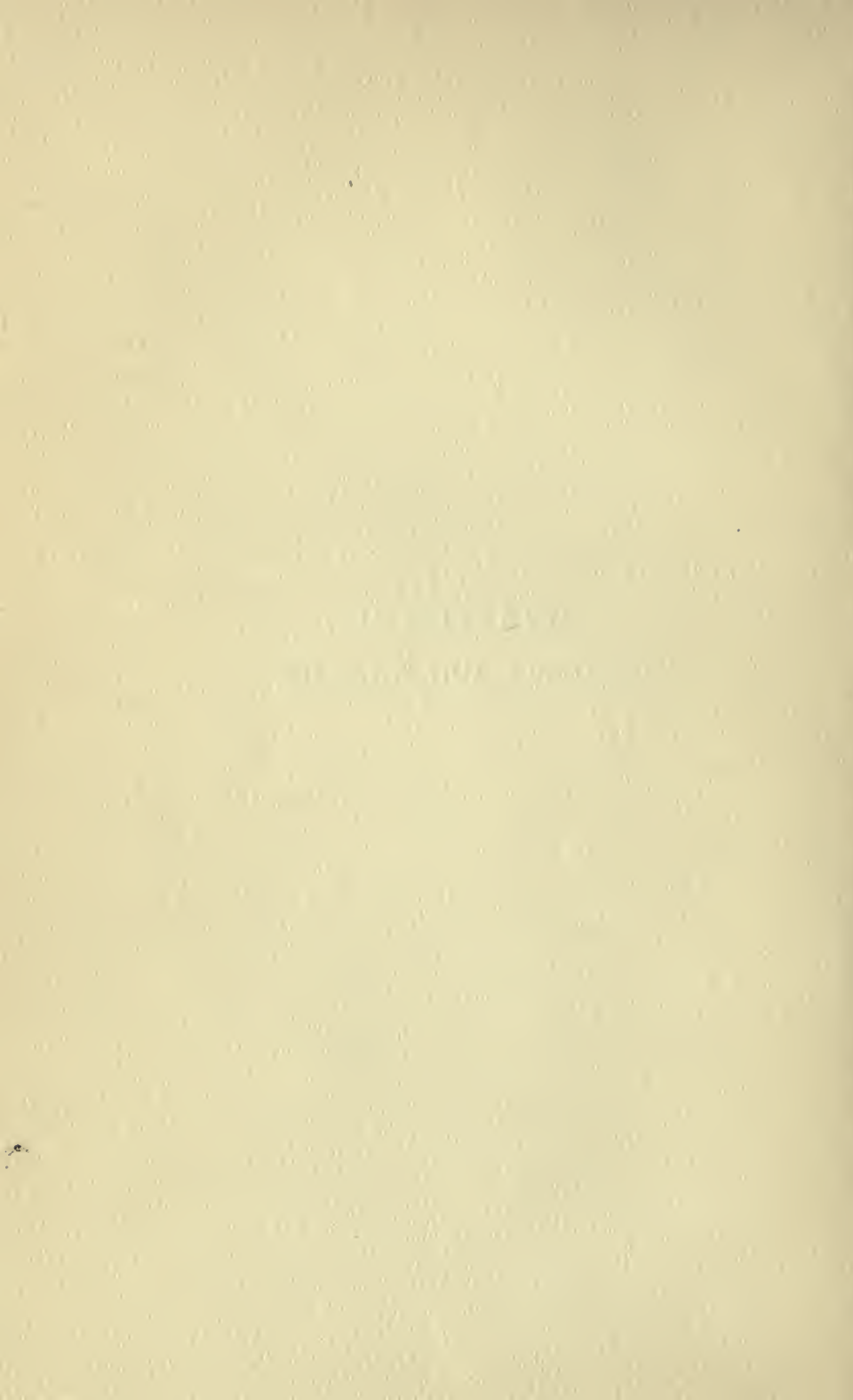
<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, VIII. 113.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, VI. 66; and VII. 345.





**CHAPTER II**  
**CASANOVA AND VOLTAIRE**



## CHAPTER II

### CASANOVA AND VOLTAIRE

Les Balances, the inn at Geneva—"You will forget Henriette, too."

Authenticity of Casanova's visit to Voltaire: letters to Algarotti—  
Opinions of Goldoni—Voltaire's illness.

Casanova's arrival at Les Délices—First encounter—Affectations and  
susceptibilities—An unlucky joke.

Voltaire's Italian friends: Algarotti—Albergati.

The *Essai sur les mœurs* and the Republic of Venice—Casanova  
upholds his country.

Literary discussions — Martelli — Merlin Cocci — Ariosto — Voltaire  
makes the *amende honorable*—Dante—Goldoni—The "Painter  
from nature"—Voltaire and Italian literature—Crébillon—  
Haller.

How Casanova was received at Les Délices—The Court of the patri-  
arch—A remembrance of the Prince de Ligne and a postscript  
from Casanova.

ON August 20, 1730, the chances of his roving life brought  
Jacques Casanova to Geneva; he stayed at the inn of Les  
Balances. In this town, and in this very house, there was  
to be recalled to him one of the most pathetic *liaisons* of his  
amorous career. There, thirteen years before, he had parted



## CASANOVA AND HIS TIME

for ever from that Henriette whom he had loved with all his customary ardour, and all the constancy of which he believed himself capable. He had met her disguised as an officer of no known regiment, in the company of an Hungarian captain, and had had little difficulty in seeing through the travesty. For many months he lived with her at Parma, calling himself Monsieur de Farusi—until one day Henriette encountered a compatriot, one M. d'Antoine, who was seeking her that he might bring her back to her people, for she was the daughter of a great house, and it was only the maddest freak which had led her to travel about in masquerade.<sup>1</sup> So Casanova learnt. The moment of parting with the pretty creature, whose enigmatic destiny had lent such a romantic flavour to their *liaison*, counted certainly among the most bitter hours in the life of one who did not as a rule trouble himself with any idle sorrow. In the little room at Les Balances, the lovers bade each other a long good-bye, unsoftened by vain hopes; and, engraving upon a window-pane the last word of their parting destinies, Henriette left to her friend this supreme monition: "You will forget Henriette too."<sup>2</sup>

He was not to forget her. Thirteen years later, when he

<sup>1</sup> *Memoires*, II. 169-238. All our references are to the Garnier edition in eight volumes.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, II. 245.

## HENRIETTE

returned to Geneva, ironic chance brought him back into the very little room of their farewells, and showed him once more the words traced with a diamond's edge upon the window-pane. All the bitterness of remembrance, all the sadness of flown years and loves, overwhelmed him pitilessly. "I threw myself into an arm-chair, and gave myself up to a thousand thoughts. Noble, tender Henriette, whom I had loved so much! where was she now? I had never heard anything about her, and I had never asked. Comparing what I was then with my present self, I had to admit that I was less worthy now to possess her than I had been at that time. I still knew how to love, but I no longer had the fastidiousness of yore, nor those feelings which justify error; I no longer had gentle ways, nor even the kind of honesty which enhances one's very failings."<sup>1</sup>

There is always something declamatory and theatrical in Casanova's most piteous moanings; and directly the curtain fell, the actor recovered that fine serenity which was his favourite pose. The day after his arrival at Geneva, he forgot Henriette, for whom he had been longing the evening before with so much fervour, and was completely absorbed in the more commonplace occupation of arranging his affairs with the banker, Tronchin. Moreover, a new interest turned the course of his thoughts; for, when he came to Geneva, it

<sup>1</sup> *Mémoires*, IV. 441.

## CASANOVA AND HIS TIME

was assuredly not for the sake of the vague, sad memory of a beloved woman, but for the sake of seeing Voltaire—or rather, to put it correctly, of being seen by him.

The account of this interview—for it is indeed an interview—occupies thirteen pages in Vol. IV. of the *Mémoires*, and it arouses curiosity and fixes attention no less by the charm of its setting than by the interest of the conversation.

Certainly we may not unreservedly accept all the details of this episode. The veracity and documentary value of Casanova's *Memoirs* have been often discussed and tested. But the labours of D'Ancona, of Charles Henry, and of all those who have compared the "steep" stories of the celebrated Venetian adventurer with historic truth, seem to have established that, in spite of some exaggeration and the errors of detail inevitable in so extensive a work, and especially in spite of all the shameless travesties which the first editor of the *Memoirs* permitted himself, the adventures of Casanova, as depicted therein, are not very much removed from the actual reality. Let us see, however, in the account of his meeting with Voltaire, how much can be depended upon as veracious.

We do not propose to verify here all the conversations which Casanova claims to have had with Voltaire, nor to



## THE "SWAN OF PADUA"

disentangle the truth from them. But some of the circumstances which he reports can be established exactly, thanks to the testimony of Voltaire himself.

On August 15, 1760, six years before Casanova's first visit to him, Voltaire wrote to the Count Francesco Algarotti, him whom he called the "Swan of Padua," to ask him for his *Lettres sur la Russie*. Voltaire was then working at the second volume of his *Histoire de L'Empire de Russie sous Pierre le Grand*. Algarotti, whose adventurous life offers more than one point of resemblance to Casanova's, after having travelled all over Europe, had finally settled down in Italy, first in Venice, then in Bologna, then in Pisa, and there enjoyed the modest fame which the publication of some works had gained him amongst his countrymen. These *Lettres sur la Russie*, which he had written in St. Petersburg, had aroused Voltaire's curiosity; he wished to make use of them, or at least to quote from his friend's book, in the second volume of his *Histoire*.<sup>1</sup> But the Letters never arrived; in September, Voltaire again implored Count Algarotti to send them.

"No, no, dear Swan of Padua, I have not received the *Lettres sur la Russie*, and I am very cross about it [this is in Italian in the text]; for if I had read them, I should have spoken of them in a very amusing preface wherein I praise

<sup>1</sup> *Correspondance* of Voltaire, letter of August 15, 1760.



## CASANOVA AND HIS TIME

people who speak of what they've seen, and laugh at those who speak at random of everything whether they've seen it or not. *Basta!* they will have to be the antiphon of the second volume. . . ."<sup>1</sup> And at the end of the letter he advises his friend to send all books to him through the banker Bianchi, of Milan, who would transmit them through a Genevan merchant named Le Fort. Voltaire himself made use of Bianchi for all his parcels to Italy.

These facts, which we are obliged to state at some length, are absolutely in accord with Casanova's story. The first words that Voltaire addressed to him, after the necessary politenesses, were to say that since he was a Venetian he must know Count Algarotti. Then he went on: "If you see him in Bologna, I beg you to tell him that I am still waiting for his *Lettres sur la Russie*. He can address them to the care of my banker, Bianchi, at Milan, who will send them on to me."<sup>2</sup> This coincidence is at least significant, and we do not need to emphasise the interest of it. One may be astonished, indeed, that Voltaire in writing to Algarotti a few days before, and a few days after, Casanova's visit, should not mention him to his fellow-countryman. But, in the first place, I doubt that Casanova's visit would have been made known beforehand to Voltaire,<sup>3</sup> and, prior

<sup>1</sup> Letter of September, 1760.

<sup>2</sup> *Mémoires*, IV. 445.

<sup>3</sup> Whatever Casanova himself may say, *Mémoires*, IV. 442.

## SUBJECTS OF CONVERSATIONS

to seeing him, he could not tell whether Casanova knew Algarotti or not. After the meeting, I think (as the continuation of this analysis will show) that Voltaire had reasons for not boasting among his Italian friends of having had Casanova at his house, nor of those conversations with him of which the *Memoirs* give us several specimens.

If we want another proof of the accuracy with which Casanova has reproduced the conversations with his host, we may find it in the very nature of the subjects touched upon. For what would Voltaire, perpetually inquisitive, and avid for characteristic documents, have talked about with a literary Italian, if not about Italian literature?

Dante, Ariosto, the sonnet, Merlin Cocci, the Italian theatre, Martelli—such are the chief subjects of their conversations. Now, if we compare Voltaire's opinions, especially on Dante and Goldoni, as given to us by Casanova, with those which we come across in the *Correspondance*, in the letters of 1760–1761 to Algarotti and Albergati Capacelli, we are struck by a curious analogy both in the ideas and in the expressions. Voltaire, at this time of his life, had a deep admiration for the art of Goldoni; it was the subject of long letters written to the Marquis Albergati Capacelli, the dramatic poet, and one of his best Cisalpine friends. Thus, in his conversation with Casanova, the very name of

## CASANOVA AND HIS TIME

Albergati is sufficient to evoke Goldoni's.<sup>1</sup> And here again is a little circumstance which may enlighten us as to the sincerity of the *Memoirs*. "Why," says Voltaire to Casanova, "does Goldoni call himself 'poet to the Duke of Parma'?" And Casanova replies: "To prove, doubtless, that a brilliant man has his weak side as well as a fool!"

Now, eight months later, on May 1, 1761, after a long silence for which he excuses himself, Voltaire writes to Albergati Capacelli: "I am just now reconsidering the later work [of Goldoni]. I divide, sir, my gratitude between you and him. As soon as I have a moment to myself, I shall read his new plays. . . . *I notice with sorrow, on opening the book, that he calls himself Poet to the Duke of Parma*; I do not think that Terence called himself Poet to Scipio; one ought not to be Poet to any one, especially when one is Poet to the public."<sup>2</sup> There again is a very interesting coincidence between the text of the *Correspondance* and that of the *Memoirs*. There is nothing astonishing in Voltaire's only having made this observation to Albergati eight months after making it to Casanova, if one remembers that Voltaire had not written to his friend in Bologna since December, 1760.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Memoires*, IV. 462.

<sup>2</sup> Letter of May 1, 1761.

<sup>3</sup> At least, there is no letter to Albergati Capacelli in the *Correspondance* between December, 1760, and May, 1761.



## VARIANCE OF ACCOUNTS

I think one could as easily find other points of resemblance, equally significant; but I shall wait until we are analysing the interviews between Voltaire and Casanova. It is sufficient for the moment to have established, by these two comparisons, the authenticity of the *Memoirs*.

There is, however, still one point, to which we would call attention: on September 5, 1760, exactly eleven days after Casanova's last visit, Voltaire writes to Albergati Capacelli: "*I have been a fortnight in bed*. Old age and illness are two very tedious things for a man who loves work and pleasure as I do."<sup>1</sup> Here Casanova's account seems at variance with Voltaire's; but it is only seeming. Casanova declares that he stayed at Les Délices for four days from August 21 to 24, and he does not in any way show that Voltaire was ill enough to keep his bed; on the contrary, if we are to believe him, his host himself did all the honours of his house and table every day. But in Voltaire's letter to his friend, to whom he had not written for more than a month,<sup>2</sup> it is quite possible that he slightly exaggerated the number of days he had been ill, so as partly to justify his silence. Moreover, we all know the exact value of the expression "a fortnight." What is certain is that Voltaire's health was very much

<sup>1</sup> Letter of September 5, 1760.

<sup>2</sup> The last letter to Albergati Capacelli is dated July 21, 1760.



## CASANOVA AND HIS TIME

shaken at this time, and there is no contradiction of this fact in Casanova's account. He mentions the presence at Les Délices of the doctor, Tronchin, whom he met on August 22; on August 23, Casanova dined as usual at Les Délices, but was on this occasion received by Mme. Denis. Voltaire did not dine with them, and only appeared in the afternoon at five o'clock: there is nothing to prevent us from supposing that an attack of the illness he suffered from had obliged him to keep his room, and even his bed. Apparently, then, we may look upon the chapter of the *Memoirs* in which Casanova tells of his visit to Voltaire as being, to a large extent, veracious. Of course we must make, as regards the details and tone of the dialogues, those general reservations which are demanded by the very nature of the circumstances and the character of the interlocutors; but on the whole the scene is accurate, and nothing can detract from its historical value and documentary interest. Moreover, Casanova himself felt it necessary to secure the confidence of his readers by an ingenious statement. When he took leave of Voltaire, before setting out for Annecy and Aix-en-Savoie, he carefully made a note of all he had seen or heard at Les Délices, and especially of what he had said. "I spent part of the night," he confesses, "and nearly all the following day, in writing out my conversations with Voltaire. I made almost a whole volume, from which I give here only





## LES DÉLICES

a short extract.”<sup>1</sup> That would have been an interesting book, and it is a matter for regret that the manuscript has not reached us. We must consider it as part of the Casanovian exaggeration, and conclude that, instead of a large volume, Casanova had merely written down the themes of the conversations and dialogues which he reports in his *Memoirs*.

It was on August 21, 1760, just as Voltaire was leaving the dinner-table, that Casanova made his appearance at Les Délices. He was brought there, and presented, by M. Vidlars-Chaudieu, and the introduction was made with a stateliness which need not surprise us, when we recall what sovereignty Voltaire practised in his retirement, and with what splendour he loved to surround himself—he who was to become the patriarch of Ferney, and who delighted in playing the part of lord of the village. Les Délices was a sanctuary of which Voltaire was the god; the worship given to himself was the only one he tolerated. An incessant stream of people—travellers, or merely curious folk, who paid homage to the genius of the place—promulgated his glory to attentive Europe. Visitors were brought to the master, and presented, as is an ambassador to an all-powerful sovereign; a

<sup>1</sup> *Memoires*, IV. 473.



## CASANOVA AND HIS TIME

smile, a kind word, even a crossness from Voltaire, was a precious favour which the small fry among his guests disputed ardently. But Casanova was not of the small fry. At the time of his visit to Les Délices, he was in the full blaze of his fame, of which he was immensely proud; and this year, 1760, the thirty-fifth of his life, marks the very height of his career. His escape from the Piombi of Venice, the most notable event of an extraordinary existence, took place in 1755; the daring of this exploit, and especially the clever advertisement he gave it, fixed public attention upon him; the curiosity which he awakened everywhere on first appearance had not yet abated. Hence he had begun to exhibit himself in all the large towns of Europe with an untiring complaisance, and a vanity which he did not seem to perceive as ridiculous.

In Munich, Paris, Brussels, Amsterdam, Cologne, Bonn, Stuttgart, Zurich, Berne, he was the lion of the moment, the man fought for by certain drawing-rooms which did not object to a little scandal, and were not too particular as to the characters of their guests; the Cardinal de Bernis, the Minister Choiseul, the Elector of Cologne, all begged him to tell them the story of his escape. One feels all through the *Memoirs* that Casanova is not insensible to the interest which his strange life awakened amongst such lofty personages. "I undertook," he says, "to tell my story to the Prince

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## UNPARDONABLE TACTLESSNESS

Elector of Cologne, provided he had the patience to hear me to the end, which, I warned him, would take two hours. 'One never wearies of enjoyment,' he was good enough to reply. . . . As soon as we left the table, he begged me to begin. I was at my best, and for two long hours I had the pleasure of interesting the most brilliant company. My readers will realise the truly dramatic interest of the story of such a situation; but it is impossible to give in a written account that air of vivacity which a well-told tale conveys."<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, Choiseul, always busy, having had the unpardonable tactlessness to ask Casanova for an abridged version of his adventures, our annoyed Venetian replied that all the interest of the tale lay in the details, and that he would hope to obtain from the Minister the two hours' attention which was strictly necessary. His susceptibilities were upset at not meeting in this case with the almost deferential curiosity to which he was accustomed, and his bad temper vented itself in reflections which are hardly polite. The whole scene is worth reading; it is most amusing.<sup>2</sup>

Indeed, at this period of his life, Casanova reminds us of the naïve drummer of Alphonse Daudet, who carried aloft through Paris a fugitive fame, relating enthusiastically humble tales of his past whose complete insignificance escaped him;

<sup>1</sup> *Memoires*, IV. 228, 229.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, III. 353.

## CASANOVA AND HIS TIME

unless one prefers to see in him a prototype of those ingenious globe-trotters to whom the smallest pretext is sufficient for claiming the attention and soliciting the bounty of the greatest modern statesmen and most illustrious celebrities. But no; Casanova was not, even at Les Délices, an ordinary guest; for wonderfully incarnate in him was that curious type which belonged essentially to the eighteenth century—the free-lance, wandering through the world, flattered beyond all others; in a word, the fashionable lion of the hour.<sup>1</sup>

In a century wherein women, according to Galiani, loved more with the head than with the heart, wherein love was chiefly a curiosity of mind, a liberty of thought, wherein vanity served as a pretext for the grossest scandals, and wherein the Richelieus found less cruel fairs than did the Cherubinos, the irresistible attraction which belongs to a man with a past, to fame whether it be good or bad, and to the audacity, the unexpectedness, and sometimes even the impudence of his acts, was for Casanova the most lasting cause of his feminine successes. This reputation made his way for him wherever he went, while he was as yet unmasked; even then it took some time for the public to tire of him, or for his admirers of both sexes to lose their goodwill.

That is how he came to introduce himself to Voltaire

<sup>1</sup> See E. and J. de Goncourt, *L'Amour au dix-huitième siècle*.



## CASANOVA'S ARROGANCE

with so much assurance and arrogance. He actually refused the letters of introduction offered to him at Lausanne ;<sup>1</sup> he would scarcely allow himself to be accompanied to Les Délices when he went there for the first time. *He* was not an ordinary traveller, a prying sightseer of any kind ; not just one of the numerous admirers of the master who solicited an audience, and were content with a commonplace reception. He was Casanova, the great Casanova, Jacques Casanova, Knight of Seingalt, who deigned to show himself to Monsieur de Voltaire, and submit to an eminent opinion his natural charm and the fascination of that audacious wit which had gained him even more difficult suffrages.

The interview began badly enough for Casanova ; or at least he would wish us to think so, probably to justify the bad humour which never left him during his visits to Les Délices, and which gave an unusual bitterness and *brusquerie* to his remarks. Casanova declares that Voltaire awaited him in the midst of a veritable court of lords and ladies, which made his presentation a most solemn affair ; and he adds : “ It can easily be imagined that this solemnity was not propitious to me.”

And yet he did not usually err from excess of shyness. But it is true that he was one of those people who show

<sup>1</sup> *Mémoires*, IV. 429.



## CASANOVA AND HIS TIME

better in a *tête-à-tête* than in a crowd; he did not pose so well for a gallery as for a single listener, and the presence of witnesses worried him and spoilt his effect when he found himself face to face with such an interlocutor as Voltaire. He liked to draw to himself the entire attention of his hosts, and was only at his best when accorded a very special notice.

On this occasion, the public nearly spoilt the whole thing: Casanova had prepared a very graceful compliment to be paid at the psychological moment, but a witticism from Voltaire interrupted it disastrously.

“‘Monsieur Voltaire,’ I said to him, ‘this is the proudest moment of my life. For twenty years I have been your pupil, and my heart is full of joy that at last I see my master.’

“‘Monsieur, do credit to me for twenty years more, and promise me, at the end of that time, to bring me my fees.’

“‘Willingly, if you will promise to wait for me.’

“This Voltairian sally made every one shout with laughter; it was part of the game, for an audience is there to keep the ball rolling and set each speaker against the other, and the one who gains most laughs is always sure to win. It is, so to speak, the party-spirit of good company.”<sup>1</sup>

Evidently Casanova had been put out of countenance by

<sup>1</sup> *Mémoires*, IV. 429.

## DISAGREEABLENESS

the jocular way in which Voltaire received his speech, and deeply annoyed by the fawning laughs of the audience. His repartee, though not unskilful, was not sufficient revenge for him. From this moment he laid himself out to be disagreeable, and systematically to contradict Voltaire. This attitude is easily understood when we consider that politeness and the grace of a well-turned compliment were Casanova's usual means of fascination, those which he valued most, and from which he was accustomed to reap most profit. Irony, which he rarely used, though he had a quick wit, disconcerted him in others; and he bore malice towards those who made him suffer it. During all the rest of the conversation he held himself on the defensive, taking care to give no opportunity to his interlocutor's brilliancy. Twice he notes, with cold indifference, the jocularities of Voltaire and Mme. Denis at the expense of Ariosto and Haller, and he takes care to observe that he alone, in the midst of general merriment, kept completely serious.<sup>1</sup>

Voltaire's reception had mortified him to such an extent that, after his first visit, he resolved never to appear again at Les Délices. "'Monsieur,' I said to him, 'I only came to Geneva to have the honour of seeing you—this accomplished, I have nothing more to do here.'"<sup>2</sup> But Voltaire, who wished

<sup>1</sup> *Mémoires*, IV. 449, 472.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, IV. 453.

## CASANOVA AND HIS TIME

to keep for some time a guest in whom he found a well-informed listener and an interesting talker, insisted in so flattering and pressing a manner, that Casanova decided to prolong his stay at Geneva, and accepted an invitation to dine three days running at Les Délices.

Moreover, if we are to believe him, Voltaire's manner towards him greatly improved. He gives with marked satisfaction evidences of the interest his host took in him, and the familiarity with which he treated him: after a pathetic recitation from Ariosto, Voltaire embraced him several times with amusing impetuosity;<sup>1</sup> the next day, he took him by the arm in a friendly way, and led him through the garden;<sup>2</sup> another day, he brought him into his bedroom, changed his wig before him, and showed him the thick bundles of correspondence which he kept in a special cabinet.<sup>3</sup> Casanova records these little incidents with an evident care; but they are mere interludes in a long dialogue on sufficiently varied subjects, and in an unchangingly singular manner.

Before coming to the literary and political discussions which he so particularly enjoyed, when he found any one who could talk to him (for he did not at all dislike opposition), Voltaire questioned Casanova about his friends beyond

<sup>1</sup> *Mémoires*, IV. 451, 452.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, IV. 454.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, IV. 456, 457.



## ALGAROTTI

the mountains, especially about that Francesco Algarotti whom he had met in Berlin at the Court of Frederick the Great, and with whom he had corresponded for several years. Indeed, this adventurer in love and letters was an interesting personality even in the eighteenth century, so full of originality in every respect. Voltaire called him his dear Swan of Padua, the

“Brillant et sage Algarotti  
A qui le ciel a départi  
L’art d’aimer, d’écrire et de plaire.”<sup>1</sup>

By a singular coincidence, the author of *Lettres sur la Russie* was not, in many ways, unlike both Voltaire and Casanova: a courtier, a literary collaborator of Frederick II., encyclopædic in knowledge, interested in, and dabbling in, everything, a pleasing compiler, a “popular” scientist, he had, like the former (as well as these accidental analogies of destiny), that wide intelligence, that passion for the pen, that need to lay himself open for, to assimilate, all the new ideas, all the “Causes” of the day, which has permitted him to be spoken of as a “pocket Voltaire;”<sup>2</sup> but he was not a Venetian for nothing, and, like his countryman Casanova, he suffered from that strange restlessness which drove him from Florence to Paris, from Paris to London, from London to

<sup>1</sup> *Épître en vers*, lxx., February 21, 1747.

<sup>2</sup> M. R. de Gourmont, in his article on Algarotti (*Grande Encyclopédie*).



## CASANOVA AND HIS TIME

St. Petersburg, from St. Petersburg to Berlin, always eager for success, desirous to show himself and to fascinate, spending his life in easy pleasure, lavish, gay, and charming, making his way through social Europe by the spell of his ever-ready smile and his graceful manners. He certainly had more elegance and refinement than Casanova; he did not, like him, show throughout life the indelible blemishes of mediocre birth and uncertain fortune; but he had the same delight in astonishing people, and in "showing off;" indeed, *that* was the largest element of his too-dashing existence.

Voltaire liked Algarotti, at least as much as he was capable of liking any one, and it seems clear that Casanova could not bear him. Algarotti always refused to visit Voltaire at Les Délices, despite his friend's pressing invitations to him to come and drink the milk of his own cows, and consult his doctor Tronchin. "By all the saints"—he writes to him in Italian, and only the use of that tongue can excuse Voltaire for using such an expression—"why do you not come into our free country, you who like travelling, who delight in friendship, success, new loves?"<sup>1</sup> Another time he invited him, as well as Albergati Capacelli, "to come and eat the trout out of his lake, before he is eaten himself by his brothers the worms."<sup>2</sup> But when

<sup>1</sup> *Correspondance*, September 2, 1758.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, March 7, 1760.

## CASANOVA'S JEALOUSY

Voltaire speaks to Casanova of Algarotti, one feels he is less anxious to express his own opinion of his Venetian friend than curious to know what impression that friend produces upon his fellow-countrymen: he questions Casanova as to Algarotti's reputation in Italy, the success of his books, and also as to the fineness of his style, which he feels that he cannot altogether estimate. Casanova's replies are just what one would have expected, considering he is speaking about a Venetian, and a Venetian who is interested, as he is, in writing and making himself agreeable.

First of all, were it merely to vex his host, on whom, as we must not forget, he had his revenge to take, Casanova would be eager to declare that Count Algarotti was ignored by seven-eighths of his compatriots, that his *Newtonism for Ladies*,<sup>1</sup> which created his European reputation, was only a "work of vulgarisation," very inferior to the *Pluralité des mondes* of Fontenelle, and in short that his style, which was full of Gallicisms, was "pitiable," "impossible."<sup>2</sup> Voltaire made no attempt to defend his friend, or at least so it appears in the text of the *Memoirs*; it would of course be foolish to be much surprised at his indifference. But Casanova's spiteful remarks call for some reflection. All the

<sup>1</sup> *Newtonianismo per le dame*. See the letter in which Voltaire thanks Algarotti for this work: *Correspondance*, November 13, 1760.

<sup>2</sup> *Mémoires*, IV. 445, 446.

## CASANOVA AND HIS TIME

criticisms he made upon his rival might have been turned against himself, and perhaps there is in his diatribe less jealousy or malice than acrimony and rancour against his own destiny. He had paid very dearly for the knowledge that no one is a prophet in his own country, and many times in his *Memoirs*, he breaks forth into bitter indignation against his countrymen for their scorn of talent, and their affectation of ignoring all who try to acquire some fame in their fatherland. Moreover, he had some knowledge of scientific matters, and the failure of several clever little works on somewhat unusual themes was a sorer subject to him than he liked to confess. Finally, when he presents his *Memoirs* written in French, though his natural tongue is Italian, does he not claim an indulgence which he regards as obligatory, since (he says) they pardoned Theophrastus his Eresian phrases, Livy his provincialisms, Algarotti himself his Gallicisms ?<sup>1</sup> So that in a manner, Casanova gives away his own case when he condemns Algarotti in this very amusing attack of spite. And, more than probably, there is something deeper still beneath the harshness of this criticism : it is the animosity of the brilliant man, of the lady-killer, towards a successful and adulated rival. Voltaire wrote on one occasion to Algarotti—

<sup>1</sup> Preface to the *Mémoires*, p. 15.



## ALBERGATI

*" Mais si notre excellent auteur  
Voulait publier sur nos belles  
Des mémoires un peu fidèles,  
Il plairait plus à son lecteur.*

*" Près d'elles il est en faveur,  
Et magna pars de leur histoire ;  
Mais c'est un modeste vainqueur  
Qui ne parle point de sa gloire."*<sup>1</sup>

Casanova, who had a less discreet way of triumphing, does not forgive the *modeste vainqueur* for having created in Venice, before he did, a reputation for irresistible gallantry, and could not bear to find, in towns where he went to ply his trade of seducer, the remembrance of conquests which had preceded his. Moreover, it was a sort of *parti pris* in Casanova to disparage in other lands all his fellow-countrymen of any fame. He was still harder upon the Marquis Albergati Capacelli, the other Italian friend of Voltaire, than he had been upon Algarotti: Albergati is a "good gentleman who has an income of six thousand sequins, and is afflicted with theatre-mania"—otherwise quite of no account; "he is a fairly good actor, and has written some comedies in prose, but they do not bear either reading or representation; . . . he writes well in his own language, but is self-conscious and verbose, and has nothing very much in the way of brains; . . . his face is

<sup>1</sup> *Correspondance*, January 27, 1759.



## CASANOVA AND HIS TIME

expressionless ; his plays did not please the critics, and they would be hissed if any one understood them.”<sup>1</sup> This is, word for word, the portrait that Casanova drew of Albergati ; yet, when Voltaire feebly protested, he affirmed that it was rather flattered.

Of this condemnation, which is not incontrovertible, it is only necessary to notice one point : that is Albergati's passion for dramatic art, which Casanova calls his “theatre-mania.” It was through this that he entered into correspondence with Voltaire. The owner of a large fortune, and of a beautiful villa at Zola, near Bologna, he had built at his own house, quite like the “old Swiss of Les Délices” and the Patriarch of Ferney, a theatre where he and his friends played his own plays, some of Goldoni's comedies, and translations of Voltaire. One day, having need of some reference as regards the mounting of *Sémiramis*, he decided to consult the author himself, who replied with much graciousness, described the costumes for the actresses, the position of the “Shade” and his costume, the arrangement of the lights, all the accessory details, and the way to represent thunder and lightning. One feels all through his reply that the stage-manager, the impresario, is more flattered even than the poet ; and in his enthusiasm he goes so far as to cry : “Blessed be Heaven which has inspired you with a love

<sup>1</sup> *Mémoires*, IV. 461, 462.

## A LASTING FRIENDSHIP

for the most divine pastime that can be enjoyed by men of taste and virtuous women, when there is more than one of each together ! ”<sup>1</sup>

This was the beginning of a lasting friendship. We can follow all the phases of it through Voltaire's correspondence. Three years after this beginning, in a long and very interesting letter, Albergati recalls to Voltaire the circumstances and common tastes which had brought them together.

“It was when I was about to present your admirable *Sémiramis* on the Italian stage that I dared to write to you for the first time, in order to get certain information which I considered necessary for a proper representation. Your gracious reply encouraged me to go on. Your first polite and ceremonious letters were followed by others delightfully witty and friendly ; and finally, when I sent you some bad writings of my own, you replied by the gift of some of your less well-known works, and of several very rare and valuable English books. I count, then, the great Voltaire as my friend, and I am proud indeed of the conquest. And do you glory in the generosity which has made you so kind to me.”<sup>2</sup>

The theatre was the subject of nearly all the letters

<sup>1</sup> Letter of December 4, 1758 (in Italian in the text).

<sup>2</sup> Letter of June 30, 1761 (in the *Correspondance* of Voltaire).

## CASANOVA AND HIS TIME

written by Voltaire to Albergati for nearly twenty years; he expounds in them at length his theories upon comedy, à propos of Goldoni's work, which Albergati had revealed to him, and which he passionately admired.<sup>1</sup> The two friends exchanged tragedies and comedies, original pieces, and translations; they also permitted themselves to make less poetical presents: at different times, Albergati sent his friend sausage-meat, Bologna sausage, and liqueurs of his country.<sup>2</sup> We must believe that Voltaire was not insensible to these gastronomic attentions, for he makes mention of them during his conversation with Casanova, in a somewhat unexpected manner: "I do not know Albergati," he says, "but he has sent me plays by Goldoni, sausages from Bologna, and a translation of my *Tancrède*."<sup>3</sup>

Very much the same reasons as he had for despising Algarotti, led Casanova to detest Albergati, and there were perhaps other more subtle motives. The "theatre-maniac" of Bologna, like the "swan of Padua," was rich, very popular, indeed almost celebrated in Italy; he had led as restless a life, and his amorous career was no less brilliant.

Casanova did not like stories about women, when he

<sup>1</sup> See upon this subject the letters of June 19, July 21, and December 23, 1760.

<sup>2</sup> Letter of February 2, 1762.

<sup>3</sup> *Mémoires*, IV. 461.



## ALBERGATI AND GOLDONI

was not mixed up in them himself. Moreover, he saw in Albergati the favourite poet of a society to which he could not belong, because it would have none of him; whatever he may say in his *Memoirs*, Albergati, as an author of comedy, *had* an immense success among the critics, to such an extent that they placed him during his lifetime on an equality with Goldoni. But while Goldoni was the favourite author of the middle-class, of the rich literary *bourgeoisie*, Albergati represented the tendencies and tastes of the Venetian and Bolognese aristocracy. In this matter of literary cliques Albergati showed himself infinitely more moderate and just than his partisans, for he had an unbounded admiration for Goldoni; but it suited Casanova, by depreciating his talent, to wreak upon him some of the hatred he had carefully accumulated against his aristocratic countrymen.

The letter which Voltaire wrote to Albergati, eleven days after having received Casanova at Les Délices, and which we have already quoted, would lead us to suppose that there was a formal controversy going on at this time between Albergati and Casanova. Here is the enigmatic phrase which points to it: "Truly the pleasure you have just given me by your translation, and by your good answer to this *Ca. . .*"<sup>1</sup> Might we not almost swear that it

<sup>1</sup> Letter of September 5, 1760.



## CASANOVA AND HIS TIME

is Casanova to whom he refers, and that the answer spoken of happens very *à propos*, after the conversation recorded in the *Memoirs* wherein Albergati is treated with so little indulgence? It is a very tempting conclusion to come to, though we must be content with merely noticing it, in the absence of a more exact and explicit document.

This conversation about their Italian friends naturally led Voltaire to question Casanova about his country, about Venice, about his ideas upon a Government with which he had no reason to be well satisfied. The first edition of the *Essai sur les Mœurs* is of 1756; at that time Voltaire was as passionately interested in history as in the drama, and he sought eagerly all personal information, all direct testimony, which could bring him a new document for the immense work which he was carrying out upon the evolution of the human mind as shown in the manners and customs of civilisation. He proceeded like our most ingenious and patient interviewers: this man who had been wandering for so many years, who liked to “study mankind on the wing,”<sup>1</sup> whose own country had rung with his adventures, and who had quarrelled with the most aristocratic of republics, captured the imagination of the historian and philosopher that Voltaire was.

<sup>1</sup> *Mémoires*, IV. 446.

## CASANOVA'S LOVE FOR VENICE

Unhappily for his plans, Casanova was not ready to submit to quite the full examination that Voltaire wished; he remained on the defensive, and parried with very remarkable caution. Was this a pose? One would suppose so, since he was not as a rule sensitive for his ungrateful country; he made no secret of regarding her as a "cruel stepmother,"<sup>1</sup> and could not forget the disappointments and persecutions he had suffered. Nevertheless, he loved Venice, with the love of a great spoilt child, revengeful and unhappy, but, subject to fits of remorse; when outlawed, he admitted his homesickness,<sup>2</sup> he made numerous attempts to obtain pardon after nineteen years of exile; and when he *had* obtained it, his return to Venice was only a fresh disillusion for him. But that a foreigner should dare to touch upon the Serene Republic, that an Amelot de la Houssaye should write his *Histoire du Gouvernement de Venise*, that a Voltaire should allow himself to doubt the benefits of that freedom whereof the Inquisitors of State were the most debatable product—Casanova blazed with indignation against such incautious critics; he could not allow a Frenchman to express the rigorous truths about his country which he did not hesitate to pronounce himself. If we believe him, Amelot de la Houssaye wrote his book "as a confessed foe to the

<sup>1</sup> *Mémoires*, VIII. 381.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, VIII. 37, 381.

## CASANOVA AND HIS TIME

Venetians ;” his history is a “slandrous satire ;”<sup>1</sup> Casanova considers it his duty to refute it, and so undertakes the *Confutazio della Storia del governo Veneto*. The reasons he has had to complain of a Government whose chiefs had persecuted him with their despotic and arbitrary power, absolve him from the least suspicion of partiality ; and he makes it his business to display to the whole of Europe the lies and blunders of Amelot.

Under such conditions, Voltaire’s insinuations to Casanova about the tyranny of the Venetian oligarchy could have no success. With a discretion which therefore appears amazing, Casanova relates the different attempts of his host to make him speak : “During dessert, Monsieur de Voltaire, knowing I had no reason to be particularly pleased with the Venetian Government, entered upon this subject ; but I baffled him, for I sought to demonstrate that there was no country in the world where one could enjoy greater liberty. ‘Yes,’ said he, ‘provided one resigns one’s self to the rôle of a dummy.’ But seeing that the topic was not pleasing to me, he took my arm and led me into the garden.”<sup>2</sup> The following day, Voltaire, who would not acknowledge himself beaten, returned to the subject.

“‘While we are on this matter, tell me, do you find yourselves quite free in Venice?’

<sup>1</sup> *Mémoires*, VIII. 38.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, IV. 454.



## CASANOVA DEFENDS VENICE

“‘As much as one can be under an aristocratic government. The liberty we enjoy is not so great as is enjoyed in England, but we are content.’

“‘What! even in the Piombi?’

“‘My detention was an act of great despotism; but, aware that I had knowingly abused my freedom, I sometimes thought that the government had been right to shut me up without the usual formalities.’

“‘Nevertheless, you made your escape.’

“‘I used my right, as they had used theirs.’

“‘Admirable! But in that way no one in Venice can be said to be free.’

“‘Possibly, but you must admit that to be free it is enough to believe one’s self so.’

“‘I cannot admit that so easily. We see liberty from two very different points of view. The aristocrats, even the members of government, amongst you are not free—why, for example, they cannot even travel without permission.’

“‘True, but that is a law which they have voluntarily imposed upon themselves to preserve their sovereignty.’”<sup>1</sup>

There is perhaps in these answers as much obstinacy as patriotism; once again, Casanova is beyond anything else desirous to contradict his interlocutor. In any case, if

<sup>1</sup> *Memoires*, IV. 471.



## CASANOVA AND HIS TIME

we do not exactly retrieve in the dialogue the bitter reflections of the *Memoirs* upon Venetian despotism, we have there a confirmation of the theories which Voltaire had expressed, or was about to express at greater length, in his *Essai sur les Mœurs*,<sup>1</sup> and in his *Dictionnaire Philosophique*.<sup>2</sup> They were, for that matter, the ideas of Amelot de la Houssaye, which were much circulated in Europe, and which Voltaire had assimilated; he is inspired by him when he writes: "Of all the European Governments, that of Venice was the sole orderly, stable, and consistent one [in the fifteenth century]. There was only one radical fault, which in the eyes of the Senate was not one, and that was a lack of counterbalance to the patrician power, and an encouraging outlook for the plebeians. Merit could never in Venice raise a simple citizen, as it could in ancient Rome."<sup>3</sup>

It seems, however, that Voltaire slightly modified his ideas during the years which came between the *Dictionnaire Philosophique*, and the *Essai sur les Mœurs*. The article which he devotes to Venice is a vibrating tribute to the liberty of the populace, with scarcely any qualification; doubtless, between 1756 and 1765, the Patriarch of Ferney

<sup>1</sup> Chaps. cvi. and clxxxvi.

<sup>2</sup> Article *Venise*, and, cursorily, in that on *la Liberté*.

<sup>3</sup> *Essai sur les Mœurs*, Chap. cvi. The same opinion is expressed in the same terms in Chap. lxxiv.

## SUPERSTITION

had had some experience of the way in which the Swiss understood and practised liberty, and this had made him more indulgent to Venice; but one cannot help pointing out that his conversation with Casanova took place between these two dates.

It may have been noticed, in the conversation which we have just quoted, that Voltaire makes only a passing allusion to Casanova's celebrated escape; nor does Casanova himself insist upon this, the chief episode of his life, though we know what importance he attributed to it as a rule, and what an effect he knew how to make with it. But there were certain things he never cared to boast about at Les Délices: Mme. Denis having asked him to tell her how he fled from the Piombi, he excused himself upon the ground of the length of the story, and put off to another day a narration which he seems never to have made.<sup>1</sup>

Venice once done with, on any other question of history or politics he very willingly threw off his reserve. *À propos* of the Marquis Albergati, he explains wittily enough to Voltaire how the *forty* of Bologna were really *fifty*,<sup>2</sup> and a little time afterwards, he resists him outright on the subject of superstition. He puts Voltaire almost beside himself by maintaining that superstition is a necessary evil. "If you do away with it," he asks, with a pretence at

<sup>1</sup> *Mémoires*, IV. 461.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, IV. 461, 462.

## CASANOVA AND HIS TIME

simplicity, "how are you going to replace it?" And the other, getting heated and exasperated, makes appeal to mankind, to posterity: "When I deliver humanity from a savage beast which is devouring it, can you ask me with what I am going to replace it? . . . Horrible blasphemy, which time will do away! I love the human race, I wish to see it all, like myself, free and happy, and superstition and liberty can never go together." But Casanova insists with an obstinacy which is not quite misplaced. A nation without superstition would be a nation of philosophers, and philosophers would never consent to obey even a constitutional sovereign, whose arbitrary power was limited by mutual agreement; one must love mankind as it is, and leave it the beast who is devouring it, for that beast is dear to it: "I have never laughed so much as when I read of Don Quixote defending himself against the galley-slaves whom he had just, with great magnanimity, set free."<sup>1</sup>

Carefully we must remember that it was very easy for Casanova to give himself the best part in this discussion, or we might imagine that it was he who was the philosopher, and not Voltaire. Certain phrases in the article *Superstition* (in the *Dictionnaire Philosophique*) offer, it is true, a very interesting analogy with the part which Casanova here takes to himself: "*There are some wise folk who declare*

<sup>1</sup> *Memoires*, IV. 469-471.



## ITALIAN LITERATURE

*that one ought to leave the people their superstitions, as one leaves them their public-houses."*<sup>1</sup> "Up to what point does policy allow superstition to be destroyed? This is a very knotty question; it is like asking how deep one ought to make the puncture in a dropsical patient, who may die under the operation. That would depend upon the prudence of the doctor. Can a nation exist free from all superstitious prejudices? *That is to ask: Can a nation of philosophers exist?*"<sup>2</sup>

Is one to think that Voltaire was here remembering his conversation with Casanova; or is it not more natural to suppose that Casanova, writing his *Memoirs* more than twenty years after the publication of the *Dictionnaire Philosophique*, was pleased to "retrieve" in that book, which he had certainly read, the ideas which he had dared to maintain against his illustrious interviewer?

The coincidences which we have just established between Casanova's *Memoirs* and certain extracts from Voltaire are not the only ones, nor are they the most curious; it is when Voltaire discourses with his guest upon Ariosto and Dante, upon Italian comedy, or upon the sonnet, that it is particularly interesting to compare his literary views with those which he expresses in his works.

<sup>1</sup> Section I.

<sup>2</sup> Section V.



## CASANOVA AND HIS TIME

We know what importance Voltaire attributed to letters, philosophy, and the fine arts in the history of a nation's development, and in the general picture of a period; he devotes to them in his *Siècle de Louis XIV.*, and in his *Essai sur les Mœurs*, several chapters which are among the freshest and most individual in both books. His interest was not limited to the writers and artists of his own time and country; he had a knowledge and understanding of foreign literature very rare at that time, and a direct acquaintance with the texts, which he increased on every possible occasion by the help of the experience and taste of his friends or his foreign correspondents.

Thus Casanova was a valuable witness, whom he was eager to question upon all the great names and works of Italian literature. On these literary subjects, Casanova strove visibly to regain an advantage which he imagined he had lost; and the conversation fell easily into a rather sharp argument. It was not without a certain feeling of triumphant pride, nor without exciting real vexation in Voltaire, that Casanova corrected, dryly or brusquely, the great man's mistakes. For example, Voltaire having said that in spite of the interest of *Orlando Furioso*, "forty big cantos was too much of it," Casanova hastened to point out that there are more than forty cantos; and Voltaire was disconcerted, reduced to silence, humiliated.

## A STORM

By a fortunate chance, Mme. Denis was there, and adroitly changed the subject.<sup>1</sup>

Another time, Casanova affirms that he was the first Italian to employ in his own language the Alexandrine metre, which he used when translating Crébillon's *Rhadamiste*; Voltaire claims the privilege for his friend Martelli; but Casanova proves to him that the "Martelliani" verses are really verses of fourteen syllables without alternate rhymes, and have nothing in common with the Alexandrine.<sup>2</sup> A fresh storm occurs *à propos* of Merlin Cocci's burlesque poem, the *Macaronicon*. Casanova thought a great deal of this work; he had advised Voltaire to read it, and Voltaire reproached him for having made him waste four hours over such trash; for his part, he would put the *Macaronicon* in the same rank with Chapelain's *Pucelle*. Casanova, very angry, undertook Chapelain's defence, and did not omit several ill-natured allusions to Voltaire's own *Pucelle*.<sup>3</sup>

There were several points, however, upon which they agreed, and on these they warmed easily to the same pitch of enthusiasm. The strongest scene of this veritable comedy is that of which Ariosto is the subject, and in which Casanova plays his part like a most accomplished actor.

<sup>1</sup> *Mémoires*, IV. 450.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, IV. 468.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, IV. 467.

## CASANOVA AND HIS TIME

Voltaire, whose admirations and dislikes were equally capricious, especially in literary matters, had not always had the "adoration" for the poet of *Orlando Furioso* which he admits freely to Casanova. He had not considered Ariosto an epic poet, and had placed him very much lower than Tasso, with that irresistible fancy he always had for establishing comparisons, and only admiring one writer at the expense of another. In the comparison which he makes between the *Gerusalemme* and the *Orlando*, his judgment is, however, that of his time; during the whole of the seventeenth century, and at the beginning of the eighteenth, both in Italy and in France, Tasso was exalted at Ariosto's expense, and it was only in the second half of the eighteenth century that the latter received all the favour he deserved. When he published the *Essai sur la poésie épique* which he gives as a sort of appendix in support of the *Henriade*,<sup>1</sup> Voltaire does not accord even the humblest station to Ariosto, in a review of the epic poets wherein he places Lucan beside Homer and Virgil, and Trissin and Don Alonzo d'Ercilla with Camoëns, Tasso, and Milton!

"There may be some readers," he remarks casually, "who will be astonished that I have not placed Ariosto here

<sup>1</sup> This work is only the translation and development of a previous essay which Voltaire had written in English when he lived for a time in London.



## VOLTAIRE ON ARIOSTO

amongst the epic poets. It is true that Ariosto has more fertility, more variety, more imagination, than all the others put together; and while one reads Homer as a kind of duty, one reads and re-reads Ariosto for pleasure. But we must not confound species. I should not speak of the comedies of *L'Avare* and *Le Joueur* in treating of tragedy. *Orlando Furioso* is of quite a different kind from the *Iliad* and the *Æneid*. One might even say that this kind, much better liked by most readers, is, nevertheless, very inferior to the real Epic Poem. Writings are like men. Serious natures are the most valued, and he who dominates his imagination is superior to him who lets it dominate him. It is much easier to paint Ogres and Giants than Heroes, and to strain nature than to follow her.”<sup>1</sup>

Must we believe, as Voltaire affirmed to Casanova, that when he wrote these lines he had only read *Orlando Furioso* in a very superficial manner, owing to his insufficient knowledge of Italian? Had he let himself be influenced, as he declares, by the opinions of some learned Italians who adored Tasso, and despised Ariosto? This much is certain, that between 1730 and 1750, in his *Correspondance* and in all his writings, it is always Tasso's name that presents itself to him in speaking of Italian poets. Thus, in the Stanzas to the Marquis du Châtelet on the epic poets, Tasso

<sup>1</sup> *Essai sur la poésie épique*, Chap. vii.



## CASANOVA AND HIS TIME

figures alone with Homer, Virgil, and Milton, and Ariosto is once more forgotten.<sup>1</sup> Voltaire's taste was too supple and delicate for him not to feel the mistake of which he had been guilty. The reparation was as brilliant as the injustice had been clumsy. Always a great redresser of wrongs, Voltaire does not spare himself, and feels no embarrassment in openly confessing his mistake. "I did not dare formerly," he declares in his *Dictionnaire Philosophique*,<sup>2</sup> "to include Ariosto among the epic poets: I had looked upon him as the leader of the grotesques; but in re-reading him, I have found him as sublime as he is delightful, and I make him the most humble apology."

This *amende honorable* is subsequent to Voltaire's conversation with Casanova; but Voltaire had not waited until the enthusiastic Venetian had made, with great impetuosity, a defence of the "divine poet," to give Ariosto the place which he deserved.

Already in the *Essai sur les Mœurs*<sup>3</sup> he puts the *Orlando* beside the *Odyssey*; if he still blames the wild imagination and the excess of the romantic, he praises the truth of the allegories, the delicate satire, the profound knowledge of the human heart, the humorous charm, which continually succeed to the terrible features—in short, those innumerable

<sup>1</sup> *Stances*, I. 3rd strophe.

<sup>2</sup> Article *Épopée*.

<sup>3</sup> Chap. cxxi.

## VOLTAIRE RECITES

beauties of all kinds which prove that Ariosto has found the secret of making an "admirable monster."

Casanova gaily suggested that Voltaire should cause to be excommunicated the work in which he had treated Ariosto so badly. "What would be the good of it?" replied Voltaire. "My books are all excommunicated." But he seems to remember this when he writes in the *Dictionnaire Philosophique*: "It is quite true that Pope Leo X. published a bull in favour of the *Orlando Furioso*, and declared that any one who spoke evil of the poem should be excommunicated. I do not wish to incur excommunication." And not only, in an amusing *volte-face*, does Voltaire here sacrifice to the glory of Ariosto whom he celebrates at great length, that of Tasso to whom he consecrates only about a dozen lines, but the theme of his dithyramb, the arguments of his literary dissertation, the elements of his criticism, and even the very passages that he quotes, are word for word the same in Casanova's *Memoirs* as in the *Dictionnaire Philosophique*. The comparison between the two texts is very curious, and seems to constitute a fresh proof of the truth and historical value of the *Memoirs*.

Voltaire desired to show, by a striking manifestation, his new-born admiration for Ariosto. Before his amazed guest—"ébahi" is Casanova's own expression—he recited in Italian a long passage from the *Orlando*, the voyage of

## CASANOVA AND HIS TIME

Astolpho to Paradise, where he goes to recover the lost reason of Orlando, and the conversation between Astolpho and the Apostle St. John.<sup>1</sup> “After this, he pointed out the beauties with all the wisdom which was natural to him, and all the acumen of a great man of genius. It would have been absurd to expect anything better from the most clever critics in Italy.”<sup>2</sup>

When Voltaire had finished, Casanova turned towards the audience and exclaimed “that he was overcome with surprise, and that he would inform all Italy of his just admiration.” “And I, sir,” replied the great man, “I will inform all Europe of the reparation I owe to the greatest genius she has produced.” The next day, he sent Casanova a translation in verse which he had made of some stanzas of Ariosto. We find in the *Dictionnaire Philosophique* several extracts from this translation; Voltaire gives them as the work of an “unknown author,” who “had imitated rather than translated.” But as one of the bits which he quotes is precisely as quoted by Casanova, in his *Memoirs*,<sup>3</sup> with some trifling differences probably due to the carelessness of the editor, we may feel sure that they are really Voltaire’s own.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The end of the 34th Canto and Prologue to the 35th.

<sup>2</sup> *Mémoires*, IV. 448.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, IV. 449.

<sup>4</sup> Compare the text given by Casanova, “Les Papes, les Césars,” etc., with the same fragment cited in the *Dictionnaire*, article *Épopee*.



## CASANOVA RECITES TOO

Casanova did not wish to be behindhand with his host; and he held it a point of honour to justify publicly the epithet "divine" which he had given to his favourite poet. Encouraged by the enthusiasm of Voltaire, and the sustained interest of a sympathetic audience, he, in his turn, recited the most pathetic passage of Ariosto,<sup>1</sup> the thirty-six last stanzas of the 23rd Canto, those which describe the madness of Orlando. He scarcely exaggerates in saying that this verse "causes one to tremble . . . and makes love frightful;" and one can easily imagine the deep impression which he produced upon his listeners. He began "in an assured tone, but not the declamatory, monotonous tone adopted by the Italians;" he recited the beautiful verses "like softly harmonious prose, which he animated by his voice and look, and by modulating his tones in accordance with the emotion with which he wished to inspire his audience. They could see, and feel, the effort he made to keep back his emotion, and tears were in every one's eyes; but when he came to this stanza—

"*Poiche allargare il freno al dolore puote . . .*"

his own tears fell so unrestrainedly, that the whole audience began to sob." Evidently he regards this emotional success

<sup>1</sup> *A propos* of this, he declares that he knows all Ariosto by heart, having been accustomed, since he was sixteen, to read him several times every year.



## CASANOVA AND HIS TIME

as one of the greatest gratifications of his life. After so many years, he still preserves a tender recollection of it, and notes its smallest particulars. Like a consummate actor, he drew tears only in order to follow his effects of pathos with those of terror ; his eloquent voice expressed the fury and the despair of Orlando with equal suppleness ; he conveyed the horror of the raging elements, the supreme struggle of the hero revolting against nature. . . . It was almost too much, and Voltaire could not conceal his ecstasies ; he threw himself on Casanova's neck, and embraced him tearfully. "I have always said," he cried, "that the secret of making people weep is to weep one's self ; but the tears must be real, and to shed them, the soul must be deeply moved." He seemed to remember on this occasion the rating he had given the ladies of Soleure some months previously ; they, who had taken it into their heads to represent *Alzire*, had not, in the pathetic scenes of the tragedy, shown a sufficiently sincere emotion to please the author. Voltaire imagined that his reputation as an author was risked in such clumsy hands ; hence he had not for his kind interpreters all the gratitude they considered their due, and reproached them bitterly for not having shed real tears.<sup>1</sup>

The scene of Ariosto is the only one which shows a real liking between Voltaire and Casanova. The two protagonists

<sup>1</sup> *Mémoires*, IV. 429.

## VOLTAIRE'S RETRACTION

each paid his account in it, and their twin vanities, equally susceptible, were silenced for a moment before a greater glory.

Voltaire discovered in the unbounded admiration of Casanova, the justification, we might almost say the excuse, for a retraction which must after all have cost him dear: in those pages of the *Dictionnaire Philosophique* which he dedicates to Ariosto as a resplendently public, though tardy, homage, one feels in each line the remembrance of this scene; and he carefully quotes as one of the most important parts of *Orlando*, those stanzas which had moved him to tears.

As for Casanova, he rejoiced in this Voltairian conversion as in a personal triumph, and readily persuaded himself that he was the author of it. Witness this most candid declaration of pride, which he makes several years after his visit to Les Délices:

“The man who has given the truest and most beautiful eulogy to Ariosto, is the great Voltaire, at the age of sixty. If he had not, by this recantation, rectified the error of judgment which he had made about that great genius, posterity would have undoubtedly refused, at least in Italy, to open to him the doors of immortality, notwithstanding all his claims to fame. *It is now thirty-six years, or nearly, since I told him what I record here, and the great man believed me. He was frightened, and did the right thing.*”<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Mémoires*, VI. 100.

## CASANOVA AND HIS TIME

All the literary impressions which Voltaire and Casanova exchanged do not by any means show so perfect an understanding. When they had finished talking of Ariosto, it seems that Casanova set himself to find his companion tripping, as indeed he himself confesses. We know that Petrarch and Dante were also the subjects of an interview ; but the author of the *Memoirs* does not deem it expedient to report to us the appreciations of Voltaire. He merely lets us see that they were unfavourable to both poets, clumsy, moreover, and unjust, as he does not fail to make the great man feel :

“He spoke to me of Dante and Petrarch, and all the world knows what he thought of those great geniuses ; but he has done himself harm by writing all he thought. I contented myself by saying to him that if these great men did not deserve the admiration of all those who study them, they would have long since fallen from the high places where the appreciation of centuries has put them.”<sup>1</sup>

It is generally known that Voltaire did not care for Dante. The article devoted to him in the *Dictionnaire Philosophique* is anything but indulgent, and the brief analysis which is given of the *Divina Commedia* ill conceals, under the irony of the form, indifference or total incomprehension. “The Italians call Dante ‘divine,’ but it is a

<sup>1</sup> *Mémoires*, IV. 455.



## VOLTAIRE ON DANTE

mysterious divinity, for few people understand his oracles ; he has commentators, which is perhaps another reason for his obscurity. His reputation will always be maintained, because people read him so little. There are about twenty lines of him that every one knows by heart ; and that suffices to spare them the trouble of examining further." Upon this matter, again, Voltaire had submitted to the influence of certain of his Italian friends, and judged rather by their prejudices than by his own personal tastes. These friends, especially those whom he had nicknamed "the triumvirate"—Frugoni, Bettinelli, and Algarotti—easily imposed upon him both their admirations and dislikes. To one of them he writes with even more freedom and less moderation than in the *Dictionnaire* : "I think a great deal of the courage with which you have dared to say Dante was a madman, and his work monstrous. Dante may be in the libraries of the collectors, but he will never be read. They have often robbed me of a volume of Ariosto ; they have never stolen a Dante. . . . Those who have the least particle of good sense ought to blush at the strange assemblage, in Hell, of Dante, Virgil, St. Peter, and Madonna Beatrice. One finds among ourselves, in the eighteenth century, people who force themselves to admire imaginings as stupidly extravagant and barbarous. . . ." <sup>1</sup> It is difficult to see what sort

<sup>1</sup> Letter to R. P. Bettinelli, March, 1761.



## CASANOVA AND HIS TIME

of courage it proved, or what interest it could have served for Voltaire, to make himself the echo of such criticisms, which even the blindest prejudice cannot excuse in an Italian scholar.

Upon Petrarch, whom he knew as little, and did not understand any better than Dante, he simply wreaks the aversion which he had for the sonnet and writers of sonnets in general. He has scarcely begun questioning Casanova about his taste in literature, before he asks him: "Have you written any sonnets?" Casanova confesses to two or three thousand, and this admission almost makes Voltaire jump; but he only remarks with somewhat rude brevity: "Italy is mad on sonnets!"

Then, on the subject of the difficulty of expressing a complete idea in so brief a poetic form, he observes again: "It is the bed of Procrustes, and that is why you get so few good ones. As to us, we have not a single good one, but that is the fault of our language." After which, he hastens to change the subject.<sup>1</sup> These reflections, however, are very moderate and indulgent compared to those with which the sonnet usually inspires him: "I prefer fifty lines of Dante," he writes to a friend, "to all the vermicules called sonnets which are born and die by the thousand every day in Italy, from Milan to Otranto."<sup>2</sup> Thus, though he

<sup>1</sup> *Mémoires*, IV. 447.

<sup>2</sup> Letter to R. P. Bettinelli, March, 1761.





CARLO GOLDONI.

[*To face p. 107.*

## VOLTAIRE ON GOLDONI

renders a meagre eulogy to Petrarch's *Canzoni* in his *Essai sur les Mœurs*,<sup>1</sup> Voltaire could not be said to care at all for one of the most glorious masters of the style he detested.

Despite the reserve and half-concealed irony which escaped through Casanova's evasive answers, Voltaire did not cease to "talk witty nonsense"<sup>2</sup> on the subject of Italian literature; even where his learning was incontestable, his judgment was frequently falsified by a preconceived prejudice. Towards the end of the conversation, it seems however as if he tried to avoid offending an interviewer whom he had several times discovered to be a contradictor, polite, but competent and obstinate. Therefore he no longer declared without some timidity his likes and dislikes. Probably that is why he there dismisses so rapidly and with so little warmth, a writer of whom he usually speaks with an ardent enthusiasm—Goldoni, "the beloved child, the painter from nature."<sup>3</sup>

To tell the truth, he had not known him for so very long. It is his friend Albergati who seems to have revealed Goldoni to him, in the same year 1760, by sending him some of his comedies. Immediately they produced from Voltaire that flood of unbridled praise which was usual in him when

<sup>1</sup> Chap. lxxxii.

<sup>2</sup> *Memoires*, IV. 455.

<sup>3</sup> *Correspondance*, September 5, 1760, and December 23, 1760; letters to Albergati Capacelli. See "*Pittore e figlio della natura*," letter to Goldoni, September 24, 1760.



## CASANOVA AND HIS TIME

he thought he had discovered something or some one. He dedicates to Goldoni three quatrains, well meant, if not well constructed, of which we give the final one :

“ Aux critiques, aux rivaux,  
La nature a dit sans feinte :  
Tout auteur a ses défauts,  
Mais ce Goldoni m’a peinte.”<sup>1</sup>

The painter of nature (he writes a little later) “ can count me among his most ardent admirers ; ”<sup>2</sup> and some time afterwards, Voltaire, when ill, pays this graceful compliment to his new idol : “ If dear Goldoni would honour me with one of his plays it would make me well ; I require this great kindness from him.”<sup>3</sup> In the end, all his letters to his Italian correspondents are long hymns of praise in honour of the great Venetian who seemed to be the incarnation of his ideal of good comedy : “ the art of teaching virtue and decorum in action and dialogue.”<sup>4</sup> He even wished to post up on the door of his theatre :

“ We will present on Thursday a sermon in dialogue, composed by R. P. Goldoni.”<sup>5</sup>

To Goldoni himself he writes with that alluring grace

<sup>1</sup> Letter to Albergati, June 19, 1760.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, July 21, 1760.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, September 5, 1760.

<sup>4</sup> *Correspondance*, December 23, 1760, May 1, 1761, February 2, 1762, etc.

<sup>5</sup> *Correspondance*, 1761.

## GOLDONI'S SUCCESS

which he could show when he wished—and as he very rarely did, it was a certain means of conquest. Goldoni was captured, and managed to exploit cleverly this kind admiration, so as to obtain for himself in France a favourable public and a genuine success. In a century which almost surpassed our own in the infatuation for foreign literature and the cult of exotic rarities, Voltaire did for Goldoni what many of our best-known critics have done for G. D'Annunzio or M. Srao. He heralded him with a ready-made fame, and when Goldoni came to Paris in 1761, and settled in France to gain less bitter laurels than those with which his ungrateful country had rewarded him, he found minds capable of caring for him, and ready to applaud him.

In his conversation with Casanova, Voltaire alludes to the plan which Goldoni had formed of leaving Venice, and seeking glory and profit in a foreign land. But there is no sign here of the enthusiastic admiration which the mere name of Goldoni generally drew from Voltaire. One can see that he hesitates even to mention him; there is more than caution, there is a very real restraint in the questions he puts to Casanova about the “poet to the Duke of Parma.” “And Goldoni, what do you think of him?” “All that any one can say. Goldoni is the Molière of Italy.<sup>1</sup>” And that is all, or nearly all; when he had drawn

<sup>1</sup> *Mémoires*, IV. 462.

## CASANOVA AND HIS TIME

from his guest this expressive definition, which had begun to be banal even in France, Voltaire retires in good order, and is content to listen to Casanova's professions of his personal friendship for Goldoni, whose "extremely gentle character" he especially praises.

Under this discreet praise there was something implied. Casanova does not fail to insinuate that the good Goldoni is less delightful in society than in the theatre: "He does not shine socially, in spite of the sarcasm so delicately scintillating in his works . . . he is a good writer of comedy, and nothing more."<sup>1</sup>

Perhaps Voltaire noticed the irony, or perhaps he did not desire to call forth, for this fresh name, the scarcely courteous attacks which Casanova's obstinacy prevented him from coming out of with any success. He kept silence this time, and reserved for another occasion his bad humour and spirit of contradiction.

He found a chance of exercising both *à propos* of Merlin Cocci<sup>2</sup> and Martelli;<sup>3</sup> but he did not abandon himself so much, soon broke off the discussion, and gave in before being beaten. Even the name of Crébillon, of whom Casanova spoke intentionally as a well-beloved master,<sup>4</sup> did not

<sup>1</sup> *Mémoires*, IV. 463.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, IV. 467.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, IV. 468.

<sup>4</sup> Casanova, during his first sojourn in Paris, saw a great deal of



## HALLER

succeed in drawing him from his reserve. That of the learned Haller inspired him with a remark which was not devoid of wit, and which quickly put an end to the conversation.

Before going to Les Délices, Casanova had stayed at Morat, and from there had gone to visit Haller in his estate at Roche. Knowing that his guest was about to visit Voltaire, Haller could not deny himself the pleasure of criticising his contemporary with more candour than kindness. "M. de Voltaire," he said, "is a man worth knowing, though in spite of physical laws, many people have found him greater at a distance than near."<sup>1</sup>

More discreet, or cleverer, Voltaire pays homage before Casanova to the scholar whom he liked so little. "One must bend the knee to this great man," he declared emphatically. "I agree with you," answered Casanova, "and I like to hear you do him this justice. I blame him for not being equally fair to you."

"Ah! possibly we are both mistaken." With this ingenious repartee ends the long conversation of which Casanova has been so solicitous to give us a detailed account. We would wish to preserve, in concluding the analysis, the

Crébillon, who taught him to write and speak French fluently. See *Mémoires*, II. 308, *et seq.*

<sup>1</sup> *Mémoires*, IV. 420.



## CASANOVA AND HIS TIME

impression of sincerity which we strove to establish at the beginning. It cannot be denied that the author of the *Memoirs* gives himself, to the end, that air of impartiality and frankness upon which he at first prided himself. He excuses himself at the close of his narrative for having sometimes been hard, unjust, and ill-natured in his conversations with Voltaire: "I ought to have been silent, respectful, and doubtful of my own opinions. I ought to have reflected that except for his railleries, which made me hate him the third day, I should have found him sublime in all respects. This reflection alone ought to have imposed silence; but an angry man always thinks he is right. Posterity, in reading me, will place me among the Zoilian critics, and the very humble reparation which I make now will perhaps never be read. If we should meet hereafter, in Pluto's abode, set free from all that was too bitter in our natures while on earth, we must arrange to be amiable; he shall receive my deepest apologies, and he will be my friend, and I his very sincere admirer."<sup>1</sup>

Was Casanova of the opinion he has expressed here, when he left Les Délices? Haller had made him promise to send him his opinion of Voltaire immediately after seeing the great man; Casanova kept his promise, and we should

<sup>1</sup> *Mémoires*, IV. 472, 473,

## THE RIVALS

much like to have seen his letter ;<sup>1</sup> doubtless we should then have gathered a more faithful impression, free from all belated scruples and literary precautions. Failing this letter, we would willingly read the copious volume of notes which Casanova made during a whole day and night, after the meeting, and in which he recorded the smallest particulars of his conversations with Voltaire. But we must content ourselves with a very much abridged and "cooked-up" account, which nevertheless betrays the true feeling of its writer.

Casanova and Voltaire must have parted very much dissatisfied with each other. They were indeed the most impossible people to come together : both pretended to a universal competence, both had exclusive tastes in literature and the most decided opinions on history and politics, both were highly passionate and obstinate. Restive under censure, quick of repartee, avid of success in conversation, greedy to monopolise attention and gain applause, they were both little disposed to concessions of any kind, and preferred to fly into a passion, or keep silence, rather than confess themselves in the wrong. It is worth noticing that when Voltaire was alone with Casanova, having led him into his room,

<sup>1</sup> It was the beginning of a long correspondence in French between Haller and Casanova, which seems to have been entirely lost (*Mémoires*, IV. 424).

## CASANOVA AND HIS TIME

away from all who formed his usual public at Les Délices, he showed himself infinitely more tractable, polite, and accommodating. The desire to astonish the gallery, and play the principal part, spoilt both of them.

It is not unlikely, as we hinted at the beginning of this study, that Casanova came to Voltaire especially to display himself, to be seen, heard, and admired, as he had already been during his wild career in all the great towns of Europe and at the houses of many well-known people. At Les Délices, he found Voltaire surrounded by a veritable court, servile in their admiration for the master, and distrustful and ill-natured towards all new-comers. Such a public exasperated and embarrassed him. He says himself at the beginning: "It can easily be imagined that all this solemnity was not very propitious to me." If Voltaire had received him alone, perhaps Casanova would have astonished him; most certainly he would have interested and charmed him. But instead, Voltaire presented him to his sycophants, not at all as a notable guest, but as a sort of amusing entertainment which might divert their idle or their malignant leisure. And thus at the very first sarcasm, Casanova retired in good order, and the whole interview was irretrievably spoilt.

On the occasion of his last visit, Casanova accuses Voltaire of having been particularly unkind to him in the

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## THE CHARM OF VOLTAIRE

things he said, counting on the fact of his guest's immediate departure : " It pleased the great man to-day to be censorious, mocking, jeering, and sarcastic ; he knew that I was going the next day." <sup>1</sup> It is very probable—as it is probable that Casanova made it a point of honour to maintain against Voltaire, on the subjects of Venice and superstition, Chapelain and Goldoni, Albergati and even Ariosto, some paradoxes of which he did not really believe a single word. The satisfaction which he experienced at putting his companion into a fury, or reducing him to silence—what he calls " bringing the bully to reason "—is easily to be seen ; he did not even try to hide it.

Nevertheless, in spite of this hopeless incompatibility of temper, such was the prestige of Voltaire at Les Délices that Casanova cannot but acknowledge, more than once, the charm of his hospitality and the splendour of the house which the master so gladly kept open for all his devotees. " Voltaire's hospitality was princely," he writes, after his second visit, " and his table luxurious, a very rare circumstance amongst his kindred in Apollo, who are not all, like him, the favourites of Plutus." <sup>2</sup> *À propos* of his immense wealth—£120,000 a year at this time—Casanova has the magnanimity to defend Voltaire against the implication that he was enriching himself at the expense of his publishers :

<sup>1</sup> *Memoires*, IV. 426.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, IV. 458.



## CASANOVA AND HIS TIME

“Far from having cheated them, he has often been cheated by them . . . he was so greedy for fame, that he often gave his works on the sole condition of their being printed and circulated. During the short time I was with him, I witnessed one of these pieces of generosity : he made a present of the *Princesse de Babylone*, a charming short story which he wrote in three days.”<sup>1</sup> Even there, though, the praise is wrapped round an epigram : “*he was so greedy for fame . . .*” And this occurs again when Casanova is doing justice to the brilliant qualities of Voltaire as a fascinating conversationalist : “We spent amid the company two hours in talking about all sorts of subjects. Voltaire lavished the resources of his brilliant and fertile wit, and charmed every one despite the caustic flashes, in which he did not spare even those who were present ; but he had a wonderful art of using sarcasm in such a way as not to wound.”<sup>2</sup>

Every one who visited Voltaire about that time got the same impression ; the luxurious splendour of his surroundings attracted them first, the brilliant charm of the host finished their conquest. The young Chevalier de Boufflers, who was received at Ferney four years later, makes almost the same reflections as Casanova : “You can have no idea,” he writes to his mother, “of the money Voltaire spends and

<sup>1</sup> *Memoires*, IV. 458.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, IV. 458.

## VOLTAIRE'S ILL-HEALTH

the good he does. He is the king and father of the region he lives in, he makes the happiness of all around him, and he is as good a householder as he is a poet. If he could be divided in two, and I saw on one side the man I have read, and on the other the man I have talked with, I should not know which to run to.”<sup>1</sup> Boufflers had fallen at once under the spell of a personality which brought itself, without any effort, down to the level of eighteen, and treated him as a good comrade. And as *he* was more anxious to please his host than to astonish him, no storms occurred to trouble their delightful meetings.

If the very character of Casanova and the nature of his talk are not sufficient to explain the coldness or relative ill-humour of the welcome he received, it is not out of place to remember that the state of Voltaire's health between 1760 and 1765 made it very painful for him to have to keep open house for all passers-by whom admiration or mere curiosity attracted. Often ill, he began to suffer from having to entertain so many unknown people. Even those among his guests who boasted most about the reception they had met with, observed the “retired” air of the great man. Others did not even have the honour of being received: witness the obstinate Englishman who *would* see Voltaire at any cost, ill or dead; finally Voltaire consigned him to the

<sup>1</sup> Desnoireterres, *Voltaire et la Société au dix-huitième siècle*, VI. 284.

## CASANOVA AND HIS TIME

devil, who, he said, had just carried him (Voltaire) off.<sup>1</sup> More headstrong or more foolish, Chassaignon laid a regular siege to Ferney, and carried the situation on a frightful winter's night, in the midst of most amusing catastrophes, of which an account is to be read.<sup>2</sup>

To please Voltaire, at this time, it was necessary to cajole and amuse him like a child or an invalid; it was necessary—and this was what Casanova could have done, but did not do, because his susceptibilities were set on guard, as it were—to conquer by sheer force of wit, gaiety, and mischief, a man who was ill and bored. That is why he was so taken with Boufflers, who really charmed him; and it was the same with that other madcap, whose name is easily evoked when speaking of Casanova, the Prince de Ligne: *he* succeeded in staying with Voltaire for eight days, during which he was in his wildest and gayest mood, and of which he gives us an inimitable account.<sup>3</sup> It was necessary above all, when in the master's company, to avoid any coldness or distracted attention, for that he never pardoned in his listeners. The Prince de Ligne gives a significant instance of this very fact. He was dining one day with

<sup>1</sup> Desnoireterres, *Voltaire et la Société au dix-huitième siècle*, VI. 284.

<sup>2</sup> In *Les Nudités ou les crimes affreux du peuple*, Paris, 1792, pp. 314–316.

<sup>3</sup> In his *Lettres et Pensées* (Geneva, 1809, pp. 330–333) *Mon Séjour chez M. de Voltaire*.



## VOLTAIRE'S RIVALS

Voltaire ; the waiting was done by very pretty Swiss maids, whose "shoulders were bare because of the heat." Voltaire was talking. While pretending to listen, the prince could not resist the pleasure of looking admiringly at the alluring necks to which circumstances would not allow him to pay a direct compliment. Voltaire stopped, and, very angry, "putting both hands" on the beautiful shoulders, he cried, "Throats and necks, necks and throats—go to the devil!"

Certainly Casanova, who enjoyed at the inn, during the leisure-moments left from his conversations with Voltaire, plenty of satisfaction of that sort, did not let himself be distracted by the servants at *Les Délices* ; but his attention was not therefore more obliging and docile towards his host. He was too much occupied with himself, with his attitudes, his words, and the effect he was likely to produce, to be able to listen as attentively as was desired. He wished to please; and did not please, for he had not been able to forget himself when necessary. Perhaps in the many countries wherein he had travelled, and hastily tried to polish and improve himself, he had never had occasion to remember a quality which had begun to be an important one in the century—that little quality called tact.



# CASANOVA AND HIS TIME

## NOTES.

I. The tenacious hostility of the Venetian towards Voltaire is attested in this curious note, discovered by Arthur Symons in Casanova's unpublished papers in the library of the Castle of Dux in Bohemia. We reproduce it as published by him (*Casanova à Dux*, in the *Mercure de France* of October, 1903, p. 73) :

“Voltaire, the bold Voltaire whose pen has no curb, who devoured the Bible, and ridicules our faith, who doubts, and, having made proselytes of impiety, is not ashamed, in the last moment of his life, to ask for the Sacrament, and to put upon his body more relics than Louis XI. had at Amboise ” (*sic*).

II. Doctor Guède, whose wide competence on all relating to Casanova is a household word, believes scantily in the reality of the Venetian's visit to Voltaire, or at any rate in the fidelity of his account of it. Nevertheless he has pointed out to us, with equal complaisance and good faith, a new argument in favour of its authenticity. This argument is a phrase taken from the famous letter to Snetlage, of which Dr. Guède published, in 1903, an excellent reprint. We read, on p. 19 of this pamphlet: “Voltaire agreed one day, in full assembly, at the house he called *Mes Délices*, that our Della Cruscan Academy had been right in never accepting the word *irreligion*, for the contrary of religion being an absurd abstraction, the word was wholly lacking in philosophy.”

## **CHAPTER III**

### **CASANOVA AS CABALIST AND SORCERER**



## CHAPTER III

### CASANOVA AS CABALIST AND SORCERER

Casanova's "*genie*"—The symbolic serpent of the Villa Ludovisi.

I. His first encounter with the marvellous—The witch of Murano—A bleeding at the nose and a nocturnal apparition—The "possessed" girl of Padua—Hysteria<sup>1</sup> and exorcisms—The Capuchin and the Jacobin.

II. Tales of witches: the Countess and the witch—A casting of the spell at Milan—Visit to the famous Bontemps.

III. The treasure of Cesena—The Capetani, father and son—The knife of St. Peter—Casanova improvises as a sorcerer—Javotte, the "virgin seamstress"—The incantation that failed—A providential storm.

IV. Casanova anticipates Fortune—An opportune apoplectic fit—A trio: Bragadin, Dandolo, Barbaro—The "oracle"—The cabalistic Pyramid—The *iperbolano*<sup>1</sup> and the spies of the Inquisition.

The oracle in Paris—The pimples of the Duchess—The ointment of the Abbé de Brosse—The predestined favourite, Mlle. de Romans.

The oracle at Amsterdam—Fair Esther and M. d'O.—Luck and lying.

Arithmancy.

<sup>1</sup> Cabalist.



## CASANOVA AND HIS TIME

### V. The Great Work.

The Marquise d'Urfé—The "*doyenne* of the French Medeas"—Cazotte—Illustrious crazy-pates—The mystic couples.

The *Hypostasis*<sup>1</sup>—Complicity of the divine Lascaris—The operation that twice failed—Analogy between Casanova and Cagliostro—Mme. d'Urfé writes to the moon—Casanova disappears.

Death of the Marquise—Her estate—Two disappointed heirs—A duel avoided.

### VI. Casanova and freemasonry.

Freemasonry in Venice—*Le Donne Curiose*—The fire at the Arsenal. Freemasonry in Rome—Cagliostro—The Egyptian ritual—The Lodge of Isis.

Casanova apprentice-mason, companion, and master-mason.

Conclusion: the genius for mystification and imposture.

Final phases: the "Earthquake trick"—Meeting with Count Waldstein—An honourable retirement.

Casanova as his own judge.

HE had his demon, as Socrates had, but this familiar did not always manifest itself in the serious hours of his life, and indeed sometimes surprised him in rather odd attitudes. One day, for example, he had brought to the Villa Ludovisi, in Rome, one of his first and most amorous mistresses, the beautiful Lucrezia. Their tender gambols, which the great trees so complaisantly sheltered, were troubled by the apparition of a serpent. The lady was desperately afraid of reptiles, but on this occasion she did not scream, and judged it inopportune to faint. She only looked languishingly

<sup>1</sup> Elementary substance.

## THE FAIR LUCREZIA

at her lover (who was himself somewhat scared), and made this remarkable statement: "Look, my heart, did I not tell you? Yes—our familiar spirits are watching over us! See how it gazes! It is trying to reassure us. Look at this little demon—nature offers nothing more occult. Admire it, for it is certainly either your familiar or mine. . . . I am sure that the darling only *looks* like a serpent."<sup>1</sup>

Thus spoke the fair Lucrezia; and Casanova, who in such moments stuck at nothing, took very good care not to laugh at an idea which so flattered his fatuity. But he watched—not without some secret uneasiness—his mysterious "genie" coiling and uncoiling, in that grass which the lovers had so beautifully disordered, its shining and supple folds; and smiled to think that lovely eyes, in all the sweet humility of passion, had ingenuously admired this unarranged-for symbol of his seduction and his force.

We shall retrieve, under more modest disguises, this "genie" of Casanova in many a critical moment of his career. If he did not believe in it himself, he at any rate quickly perceived what a good thing it would be for him that others should—and they did. One of his principal and most successful "ways of getting there," in that age of Illuminati and charlatans, was precisely the occult reputation that he fashioned for himself; it is among the essential

<sup>1</sup> *Mémoires*, I, 277.

## CASANOVA AND HIS TIME

features around which are grouped the most characteristic events in his *Memoirs*. Thus it is not without interest to examine Casanova's methods of preparing himself for his rôle of magician, and, later, of keeping it up.

### I

Sorcery had early invaded his life. He was not nine years old when his grandmother Marzia, to cure him of a violent bleeding at the nose, took him to Murano to consult an old witch, whose den and incantations he has described for us.<sup>1</sup> After the usual preliminaries, the hag promised him that he should be cured, and announced that on the following night he was to have a visit from a charming lady, but must speak of it to no one. All this hanky-panky deeply impressed the child, but there is nothing very singular in that. What *is* so, are the reflections with which, sixty years later, these memories inspired Casanova: "It would, of course, be ridiculous to attribute my cure to these extravagances; but I think, too, that one would be wrong in absolutely denying that they can at all have contributed to it. . . . Doubtless there have never been any real sorcerers in the world, but it is none the less true that their power has always existed for those whom the rascals have been clever

<sup>1</sup> *Memoires*, I. 23.



## WITCHCRAFT

enough to persuade that they possess it. . . . Many things acquire reality which have their earliest birth in the imagination ; and in the same way many effects which are attributed to faith may very well be less than miraculous, although they actually *are* miraculous for those who attribute unlimited power to that faith.”<sup>1</sup>

Would it be possible to express more gracefully, with more consummate ease, a reliance on, and an admiration wholly freed from scruples for, the gentle art of duping people under pretence of rendering them a service ? It is as if he said to the good Marquise d’Urfé, and to the nobleman Bragadin, and to all his innocent victims : “ What geese you were to believe in the things I told you, my good people ! But then it made you so happy. . . . And after all, since you *did* believe in them, my fables and my chimæras were as real for you as the truths of the professors and the hypotheses of the philosophers.”

Casanova’s second encounter with the marvellous dates from his sojourn at Padua, and was no less instructive than the first. It was in 1736 ; he was eleven, and was at school with one Dr. Gozzi, with whom he pursued extremely vague scholastic aims. The doctor’s sister, Bettina, a precocious monkey of thirteen, “ pretty, gay, and a great novel-reader,” to whom it seems that we must assign Casanova’s

<sup>1</sup> *Mémoires*, I. 25.



## CASANOVA AND HIS TIME

initiation in the eternal feminine, was seized one night with convulsions which put the whole house in a turmoil. It was nothing but a nervous seizure,<sup>1</sup> and a quite natural consequence of the day's events; but no one would accept so easy an explanation. While all the family stood in a row around the bed, whereon the girl, half-naked, "was kicking out and hitting in all directions, tearing herself violently from those who tried to hold her, arching her body, twisting herself from right to left," somebody let fall the name of the devil, and all instantly came to the conclusion that Bettina's malady was the result of a spell cast on her by a witch.

The reader should turn to the *Memoirs*<sup>2</sup> for the scene between the angry mother and a poor servant-maid who was accused of this "ill-willing." Above all, Casanova's piquant commentary should be enjoyed: "The novelty of these mysteries captured my attention. They all seemed to me either mad or imbecile, for I could not without laughing imagine devils in Bettina's body." Nevertheless, he watched, with all a child's curiosity, the various attempts at exorcism practised on the victim: one after the other, a very ugly old Capuchin friar, and a famous and very attractive Jacobin one, vigorously attacked the devil. Victory lay with the

<sup>1</sup> Dr. Guède says an hysterical attack.

<sup>2</sup> Vol. I. p. 53.

## BETTINA

Jacobin, who, after a most secret interview with the girl alone, restored to her the reason she had lost.

That Casanova, who was only a small boy, should have disentangled the threads of this comedy, seen through Bettina's perfidy, subtly noted the different phases of the business so that he could reconstruct it in its smallest details after many many years had gone by, is an instance of such miraculous penetration that one would disbelieve the whole story if it did not actually present every mark of probability. At all events, this scene, more humorous than impressive, left him with a valuable memory, for Bettina's contortions and the manœuvres of the exorcists taught him the same lesson as the incantations of the witch at Murano. At an age when the richness and independence of his temperament were beginning to declare themselves, he perceived the power of error, when upheld by a strong will, over feeble intellects, and divined all the resources of illusion, and the fatal sway of reasoned and accumulated suggestion. Thus, if we wish to understand Casanova as a cabalist, magician, and sorcerer, if we seek to explain the most fantastic triumphs of his varied and adventurous career, and that power of inspiring awe which several times stood him in good stead, it is to these childish memories, these unforgotten scenes of sorcery and exorcism, that we must turn.

# CASANOVA AND HIS TIME

## II

Nor did Casanova's relations with witches by any means end there. In other crises of his life we retrieve this essential product of the eighteenth century. From those earliest impressions which we have just analysed, there remained with him an underlying tendency, never successfully resisted, to superstition. By dint of making dupes and inspiring awe, he arrived at occasionally snaring himself in his own sort of intrigues and inventions. One day he went so far as to believe himself actually under a spell.<sup>1</sup>

It was in Milan. An adventuress of the first water, the Countess Rinaldi, wishing to make Casanova passionately enamoured of her extremely mature charms, had had recourse to the artifices of a witch. The proceeding was not original, for it was copied from the Greeks, and Virgil, following Theocritus, has described it. There is scarcely any difference, in fact, between the scene which Casanova depicts and that in which the two poets relate the magic ceremonials whereby a shepherdess seeks to reclaim an unfaithful shepherd. The countess had managed to procure some of her fickle lover's blood, and entrusted it, mixed with her own, to the hands of an old witch who was to cast the spell. Mysteriously warned by a disinterested Capuchin, Casanova hastens to the

<sup>1</sup> *Mémoires*, VI. 22-28.



## THE WITCH OF MILAN

sorceress, taking care to carry his pistols and copiously replenish his purse. His resolute bearing, and the sight of the weapons and the sequins, all conspire to awe the witch, to whom he declares that he will not leave without “the mysterious bottle and *all that depends on it*.” He then follows her to her laboratory, and is much amazed by the sight of “a thousand things that common-sense could see no use for. Phials of every size, stones of every colour, metals, minerals, big and little nails, pincers, stoves, deformed statues—heaps of things like that”: it was indeed an odd array. But he does not linger long among these trifles. The gold coins, lavishly displayed, break down the witch’s hesitation, and cut short her professional airs and graces. She brings him the bottle containing the mingled blood-drops. . . . Casanova admits that at the sight of this, “his hair stood on end, and a cold sweat broke out over his whole body.” Then he was shown, in a large casket, a nude wax statuette on which his own name was graven—the figure, roughly modelled, reproduced his features fairly well.

“Woe to you,” pronounced the sorceress, “if I had bathed you in that blood, mingled according to my art! and woe twofold if, after having *indued* you, I had put that likeness upon a burning brazier!” But, without listening further, Casanova hastily threw the wax figure into the fire,



## CASANOVA AND HIS TIME

and emptied the phial out of the window . . . paying smartly for the double satisfaction.<sup>1</sup>

Having thus redeemed the liberty of his senses and the peace of his soul from the sorceress of Milan, he permits himself some sceptical comments. Too late he affirms that, despite a fleeting and involuntary uneasiness, the witch and her den and her divers instruments inspired him with nothing but a scornful hilarity. Why, if that was so, had he thus hurriedly destroyed the charm, and paid thus dearly for a derisory precaution? The truth seems to us to lie rather in his reflections after the Capuchin's visit: "When the good priest had gone, I did not feel inclined to laugh. Reason, it is true, told me to despise this ridiculous incantation, and not to stir a step to undo it; but a tendency to superstition, of which I have never been able wholly to get rid, prevented me from listening to reason. And, moreover, I had liked the Capuchin. He looked an honest man, and so respectable that I felt as if I had bound myself by a promise. He had convinced me, and my reason told me that one should never

<sup>1</sup> It is not inappropriate to remark that spell-casting is still practised, and successfully, if one may so speak. To be copiously edified on this point, it is only necessary to read the reports given by the newspapers of the time of some curious experiments made in 1892, (notably) by Colonel de Rochas at the laboratory of the Charité, "in the presence of two doctors, members of the Académie des Sciences, and of a well-known mathematician."

## BONTEMPS OF PARIS

act against one's conviction."¹ And, further, we know with certitude (for Casanova himself ingenuously confesses it) that when he did not go for his need to consult oracles or sorceresses, he went for his interest and amusement. Thus, in Paris, he saw the famous Bontemps, who was "drawing" the whole town and even the Court, for the Abbé de Bernis and Mme. de Pompadour were among her most frequent customers.² She offered the worthy Venetian a recipe for making himself irresistible; but he had his own ways and means to that end, nor does it appear that he had at all exhausted them.³

There are, then, in Casanova's life, at least three avowed sorceresses: she of Murano, she of Milan, and she of Paris. But we are not obliged to believe that there were no more. Even for a well-balanced mind, illusions are as innumerable as are the varying relations of men with one another; or, again, of men with things. Moreover, our adventurer's diversified career was essentially concerned with love and gambling, and lovers and gamblers are among the easiest victims of illusion, for in the caprices of fortune, as in those

¹ *Mémoires*, VI. 24.

² See on this point the *Mémoires* of Mme. du Hausset, pp. 104, 105; and most particularly the very exact prediction that Bontemps had made to the Abbé de Bernis, and the curious story of a visit that Mme. de Pompadour paid to the den of this illustrious sibyl.

³ *Mémoires*, VI. 25.

## CASANOVA AND HIS TIME

of passion, there is an incalculable occult side which justifies the weakest superstitions and most absurd prejudices. Casanova had plenty of both; and it is well to say so before presenting him as himself a magician, making use—and profitable use—of the lessons which his own experience had taught him.

### III

In despite of chronological order, we must begin this account with those facts which best display the effrontery and reckless “go” of our tyro in sorcery. We allude to the Treasure of Cesena. The adventure belongs to the year 1748, when Casanova was twenty-three.

Legends about hidden treasures are as constant as is human credulity; in most of the countries called civilised—and, indeed, I think in those alone—there persist to this day, widely held by peasant-communities, age-long traditions attributing to some old ruined castle, or solitary moor, or forbidding cavern, the possession of a colossal fortune, all the more marvellous because nobody has ever seen it.<sup>1</sup> There was a time when, in certain parts of Italy—since we are concerned with an Italian story—treasure-seekers were as

<sup>1</sup> The Scottish peasants believe that the mountains hold subterranean treasures, guarded by giants and fairies. In Brittany, the belief is that they are guarded by an old man, or a serpent, or a black dog, or tiny demons. (See Collin de Plancy, *Dictionnaire infernal*, s.v. *Trésors*.)



## HIDDEN TREASURES

numerous as the discoverers of river-sources in the Middle Ages, or as prospectors in California. Even to-day, the *nuraghes* of Sardinia attract a rich harvest of dupes and a crew of ingenious knaves to exploit that fruitful soil.

*Our* treasure was at Cesena, in the Papal States. Casanova was put on its track by a strange pair of visionaries, the Capetani, father and son, whose acquaintance he had made at Mantua. They had brought him to their dwelling to show him a so-called "museum of natural history," wherein the greatest rarities were a genealogical tree, some books of magic, a few pious relics and ancient coins, a copy of Noah's Ark, many Masonic emblems—and finally, an old knife of singular shape, eaten away by rust. According to Don Antonio di Capetani, this knife was nothing less than the authentic weapon with which St. Peter had cut off the ear of Malchus.

One can understand how the spectacle of such insanity and the maunderings of the ancient lunatic may have inspired the youthful, high-spirited, and needy Casanova, always on the hunt for expedients, with the idea of a grand mystification. What is prodigious, at such moments, is the rapidity of his inventive genius, and the no less remarkable facility with which his most absurd lucubrations imposed on his dupes. In the twinkling of an eye, as it were, he has pocketed the knife, fashioned from an old shoe a precious



## CASANOVA AND HIS TIME

sheath which he sells as authentic to the dazed Capetani, and spun the fable of a mysterious power attached to the venerable blade in its no less venerable sheath. With this talisman (he most gravely and impressively affirms) one can become possessed of all the treasures hidden in the soil of the Papal States : St. Peter's knife, like the divining-wand which causes water to gush from the earth, will reveal the exact place where all this wealth is buried, and restore as by a miracle the primal efflorescence of gold and precious stones. And as the Capetani happened to know, in the Papal States, a simple peasant who was sure that he possessed a great fortune hidden in his cellar or his fields, Casanova at once extemporises as a treasure-finder, and forms, for this great enterprise, a solemn plan with the two proprietors of the knife.

Colossal as were the swindles of our adventurer, it really seems that he always made it a point of honour to sustain them adequately ; and there is hardly an episode in his career from which he did not escape with some degree of credit. We shall see that in this one also he managed to cut a fairly decent figure. After having displayed the inception of this adventure, we must next draw attention to the miraculous aid that chance was wont to accord to Casanova in the most difficult junctures. The Capetani, in confiding to him the existence of the treasure, had, in a last spasm of

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## THE TREASURE OF CESENA

caution, omitted to mention the exact spot where it was buried. But Casanova had sharp eyes, which were always busy in discovering what he was not desired to see. In a letter, from which they read to him only the vaguest passages, he managed to decipher the name of the town of Cesena. It was all he needed to confirm his prestige with the two simpletons, and definitely capture their credulity. "An elemental spirit whom I have at my disposal," he declared, "is ready to reveal to me the place of your treasure." He took a pen and paper, traced some figures and mysterious signs, and then, as if under the influence of some secret force, ended by writing the name of the Rubicon, which is the torrent that runs by Cesena. Here, his genius shows itself in the skilful mixture of precision and a kind of elegant restraint, which led him to write Rubicon rather than Cesena, to prefer to the actual name seen in the letter, the vaguer, but sufficient, indication which is a characteristic of the ambiguous answers of oracles. And the Capetani, lost in admiration and apt for any folly, could not say enough of such marvellous divination.

To keep up his part, Casanova went to a library and there concocted, with the help of some dictionaries, an extravagant memorandum in which he indicated the exact situation, dimensions, and value of the treasure, together with some details of the historical circumstances in which it

## CASANOVA AND HIS TIME

had been buried. "On a night of full moon," he concluded, "a learned philosopher shall succeed in raising the treasure to the level of the soil, by standing in the Great Circle." This precise declaration finished the Capetani; the plan was decided on, and three days later, the magician-improvisatore, in company with Don Antonio's son, reached Cesena by way of Ferrara and Bologna.

It seems to us unlikely that Casanova merely wished to amuse himself at the expense of these two poor idiots, as he uncompromisingly calls them; we must not fail to recognise that the hope of illicit gain was not wholly foreign to his plans. In exchange for the precious sheath, he had made the Capetani promise him five hundred sequins; and he hoped for the same sum as a reward for his cabalistic efforts, on the issue of which he had no illusions. Besides, during the whole time that the comedy should last, he would be housed in the country at the expense of the owner of the treasure, and he was not in a position to sneeze at any such hospitalities.

That which was offered him was by no means to be despised. The house was pleasant, the rooms were comfortable, the food abundant and delicate, the good folk very obliging. Among them, Casanova at once distinguished an attractive child of fourteen, the pretty Javotte, whom he claimed as his servant-maid, while awaiting better

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## CASANOVA'S MAGIC POWER

things. From the beginning, indeed, he played the master in the house, which was already thrilled with the renown of his magic powers; and he was careful to enhance the curiosity and respect of his hosts by extravagant conduct and incomprehensible habits. He demanded for himself alone a double-bedded room and a bath-room; at his service there must be "a seamstress, a virgin from fourteen to eighteen years old, who would be loyal to the secret"; he ate only certain selected food, drank a rare wine, did solemn ritual ablutions, and pronounced aloud terrible words of which no one could guess the meaning.

The odd thing is that all this hanky-panky was not fortuitous. We are bound to believe that Casanova had some notion of magic, for a certain number of his proceedings are borrowed from the traditional art of the most esteemed sorcerers. Thus, when he uses storax, myrrh, and sulphur to purify the air of the house and render it agreeable to the spirits, he is merely applying one of the most common formulas of hermetic science, which ordains, for every ceremony, the use of appropriate perfumes chosen according to the planetary connections. Equally well known is the considerable part played by baths in the initiation of the adept: during the whole period which precedes the grand operation, he is expected to plunge himself every morning in water consecrated by means of a handful of



## CASANOVA AND HIS TIME

salt ; the formularies even indicate with much precision the psalms which should be recited before, during, and after the bath.<sup>1</sup>

These preparations lasted several days. In the leisure left to him, Casanova passed delightful hours in caressing the “young virgin seamstress, loyal to the secret,” who naturally turned out to be the charming Javotte. Despite a sunburnt skin, an over-wide mouth, and rather fat hands, she pleased him, and he knew how to make her aware of it ; in memory he kindles again over the admirable teeth, the sensual lips, of the girl, over her well-shaped, solid breasts, her childish grace—and sums up with “she was a fine creature on the whole.”<sup>2</sup> But he did not permit himself anything more than harmless familiarities with her, the virginity of this assistant being, it appears, an essential part of the enterprise.

While waiting, he utilised her talents as a seamstress, and got her to make him a mage’s costume in stout white linen. It was a kind of monk’s robe with a hood ; and the equipment was completed by an imposing crown of parchment cut into seven points, on which Casanova had drawn and painted horrible symbols. This costume conformed to the tradition which exacted, for magic operations, “a

<sup>1</sup> Papus, *Traité élémentaire de magie pratique*, p. 443.

<sup>2</sup> *Mémoires*, II. 152.

## MYSTERIOUS PREPARATIONS

vestment of white linen, in the shape of a wide gown, which should have no opening but that for the head, and should reach down to the feet.”<sup>1</sup> It is not in general laid down that this robe must be sewn by the hands of a virgin, as Casanova had exacted ; but it had to be new, and purified by a special consecration, “exorcised,” censed. Nor had our tyro in sorcery forgotten the wand, which was flexible and of olive-wood, in default of hazel.

The very slowness of the mysterious preparations kept every one in breathless curiosity. The good peasant, avid and superstitious, in whose domain the ceremony was to take place, spent sleepless nights ; the younger Capetani awaited confidently the marvellous effects of his knife. Positively the very house that sheltered the charlatan, and the very soil wherein reposed the treasure, struck the same note, as it were, of general lunacy by various fantastic manifestations. The dwelling, indeed, presented every symptom of a haunted one : at night, subterranean knockings, made at regular intervals, were distinctly heard ; the door of the cellar opened and shut again all by itself, and violently ; shadows flitted about the courtyard, intermittent flames played upon the surface of the neighbouring fields. Casanova had studied all these phenomena at close quarters, and had given up any idea of a rational explanation of them,

<sup>1</sup> Papus, *Traité élémentaire*, etc., p. 436.

## CASANOVA AND HIS TIME

with the exception of the last-named; but he secretly laughed at them, attributing all to "some adroit and well-concealed roguery." He of course did not reveal this scepticism to his hosts, for he bore in mind that such occult happenings would increase their credulity, if indeed they were not the actual and solitary cause of the whole fable about the treasure.

At last the great day, or rather night, fixed on for the operation arrived. Casanova had definitely undertaken "to conjure the gnomes to lift the treasure to the level of the soil, in that same place where he had made his incantations." On a night of full moon, at twelve o'clock, he descended to the courtyard, alone, with his vestment, crown, and wand, while the farmer and Capetani stood on the balcony ready to hasten to him at his earliest call. Clouds were scudding across a bloodshot moon, lightning gashed the sky at intervals, and a dull grumbling followed and endured. So eerie a setting accorded marvellously with the comedy, and was in fact to supply it with a *dénouement* that was almost natural, and arrived in the nick of time. On the ground, Casanova had spread out a large circle made of sheets of paper sewn together, whereon he had painted weird words and symbols. This circle, which he calls the "Grand" one, was no other than the famous Magic Circle, which all magicians use, and which symbolises the will of

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## THE GREAT NIGHT

the operator, and isolates him from all influences outside it. It is the very basis of ceremonial magic; but it ought to be described with a consecrated sword, or else with charcoal-powder, the magnetic insulator *par excellence*. In his haste, however, our ingenious adventurer had traced it with a pencil on paper, and doubtless had marked it, as custom demanded, with cabalistic signs, recalling the hour of the operation, the guardian angel of the hour, the spirits who presided at the ceremony, besides a pentagram, an “x,” a “w,” and other mystic characters.<sup>1</sup>

Having placed himself within the inviolable circle, Casanova would not have failed (for it belonged to his part) to pronounce the “incantation of the Four,” then the “incantation of the Seven,” and finally, the “grand invocation of Solomon”; doubtless also he invoked the angels or the spirits who presided over the seven planets, the seven days of the week, the metals, the colours. . . . But, indeed, events scarcely left him time for all this.

There happened, in effect, a thing too simple to have been foreseen amid this cleverly woven tissue of extravagant combinations. The storm which had been threatening since nightfall broke out—formidable, awful; such a storm that Casanova was seized with uncontrollable panic. Exposed to the tumultuous violence of the unchained elements, cowering

<sup>1</sup> On all this, see Papus, *Traité élémentaire de magie pratique*, p. 443.



## CASANOVA AND HIS TIME

on the drenched ground, his face, seen by the flashes of the lightning, as white as his spotless magical vestments, incapable of making a movement or pronouncing a syllable, all his prestige forgotten as if it had never been, he passed in that hour some of the most unpleasant moments of his life. He confesses it, for that matter, with simplicity, and draws from his attitude in the happening an unexpected moral. "I saw then," he declares, "that an avenging God was punishing me by a single stroke for all my villainy, and was going to put an end to my infidelity by destroying me."<sup>1</sup> The most delightful part of all is that he was taken in himself by his own enchantments: the magic circle he had traced for his dupes then appeared to him as an inviolable asylum against the malignity of the forces of nature; he believed that he was safe from the thunder, from the vengeance of an implacable God, so long as he remained among the cabalistic signs—and he did remain there, motionless and voiceless, until the storm was over. It was well for him that he did, for if he had fled at the beginning, he might have betrayed, by so untoward a timidity, the hypocrisy and futility of his "science;" while, on the other hand, his impassible attitude served him admirably, for his companions in the plot, watching it, could interpret as the mystic ecstasy of a great magician what was really inert terror of the powers of the

<sup>1</sup> *Mémoires*, II. 160.

## CASANOVA FLITS

air, conspiring against him. Moreover, the wind, rain, and thunder naturally appeared to them as so many malevolent spirits implacably bent on defending the treasure. Never, in short, did a storm break out more opportunely.<sup>1</sup> At any rate, Casanova thought so, when some hours later he could regain his room and his bed, still all pale and trembling. The result of his meditations was that he must be off at once, without even profiting by the final favours which were offered him unblushingly by the candid Javotte. To forge a new fable which should explain the failure of the operation to his dupes was a mere nothing; he deigned to reveal to these that he had obtained all necessary information from the seven gnomes who guarded the treasure—let us point out in passing the mystic number seven—but that he had been obliged to conclude with them a truce *sine die*. For the rest, he gave the farmer all the necessary indications, together with the detailed description of the treasure, making him swear to await his, Casanova's, return, and not to entrust to any other magician an operation which was merely deferred. Then he restored to Capetani the knife

<sup>1</sup> Generally, indeed, tempests did arrive in the nick of time to lend to these sorts of incantations all the mysterious horror with which they ought to be surrounded—or so it appears in the narratives describing them. While the guardian demons of the treasures were being invoked, thunder growled, lightning flashed, chariots of fire soared into the air, noises as of chains were heard. (See Collin de Plancy, *Dictionnaire infernal*, *loc. cit.*)

## CASANOVA AND HIS TIME

of St. Peter, and its sheath—for which he did not omit to claim the agreed price ; made his farewells to the inconsolable Javotte, and left the haunted house with no notion whatever of revisiting it.<sup>1</sup>

In the circumstantial account that he gives us of this prank, Casanova assigns for his hurried flight an unexpected reason. The terror of the Inquisition was pursuing him ; he believed that there was already an army of monks at his heels. Remember that we are in the Papal States. The operation, or the simulacrum of an operation, that he had attempted, savoured of heresy ; several professional or extemporised magicians had lost their liberty, and even their lives, in these little games, which they were alone in considering harmless. One of them who, forty years before, had essayed to disinter the Treasure of Cesena, had been obliged to flee (having been denounced at Rome), only just in time to avoid arrest. Casanova knew this, and the providential example inspired him with a salutary prudence. Therefore, when he had arranged the situation in such a way as to protect his vanity, his prestige, and his personal safety, he hastened to take refuge in the neighbouring town ; then he set out for Naples, in search of new adventures.

This one seems to us sufficiently characteristic of his “genie” to merit some detailed analysis. It is, almost at

<sup>1</sup> *Mémoires*, II. 162, 163.



## SMART SWINDLING

the dawn of his career, the finished prototype of that spirit of mystification which he was to mingle with all his undertakings, and to employ by preference to obtain the necessary resources which play sometimes denied him. For, despite his restrictions, his semi-confessions, his retrospective blushes, there can be no doubt that all this was tolerably smart swindling. He exploited the credulity of the Capetani and of the Cesena farmer as he had exploited that of the Senator Bragadin, and was to exploit that of the Marquise d'Urfé. He says, deliciously, that he would have thought it derogatory (*sic*) to let the Capetani have for nothing that sheath which he had fashioned from an old shoe, and that, for the rest, he considered it a joke to use to his own advantage the ignorance and folly of a Papal Count; but we are forced to remark that he does not issue from the business with clean hands, and that the operation enriched him to the tune of a thousand Roman crowns. That is too much for a disinterested person.

### IV

About two years before the farcical comedy which we have just recounted, Casanova had acquired, in the domain of occult science, a more honourable rank and less precarious titles. Turned into a cabalist without his own volition,



## CASANOVA AND HIS TIME

and, as we shall see, by the most miraculous of hazards, he had doubtless imbibed from this brand-new knowledge some food for his later, coarser mystification ; but in reality there is no comparison to be made between the brief adventure at Cesena and the sagely conducted intrigues which we are about to describe. The first depends on a fortuitous and feeble, not to say silly, attempt at sorcery ; the others are reasoned and methodical cabalistic doings. We allude to the supernatural *oracle* of which he claimed to possess the secret ; and to the operation, called the *Great Work*, which he attempted on the Marquise d'Urfé.

These facts, the recital of which occupies nearly a quarter of the *Memoirs*, constitute, despite their incoherence and apparent exaggeration, some very precious documents with regard to the state of people's minds in the eighteenth century—divided as we know that age to have been between the two extremes of rationalist doubt and mystic credence, between the most audacious scepticism and the most absurd superstition. They help us to understand Gabalis, Mesmer, Saint-Germain, and Cagliostro, the new fashion of hypnotism, the rage for the mysteries of ancient freemasonry, for the elixir of life, and the Philosopher's Stone—all in a century which prided itself on recognising no God but reason, and no masters but the senses. It is a proof of Casanova's superior intelligence that he should have fore-

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## IN DIFFICULT STRAITS

seen this tendency in his contemporaries, and the irresistible success which awaited an unscrupulous person in the subtly graduated use of occult powers.

It was on an April night in 1746 that he first perceived it. He was then in one of the most difficult straits of his life—a needy poor devil scraping the fiddle for daily bread in the little theatres, and at private parties. As he was leaving a ball, rather late at night, he found himself just in time to pick up the noble senator, Bragadin, who fell, in an apoplectic fit, almost into his arms. His lucky star ordained that he should restore the invalid in a notably short time by having him opportunely bled, and by opposing the application of a mercurial ointment imprudently prescribed by the physician. And so, in the course of a few hours, behold Casanova installed in the palace, and by the pillow, of the senator, ordering his servants about, capturing the admiration and gratitude of his friends, snubbing his doctors—in a word, master of the intelligence, confidence, and affection of a man who regarded him as a saviour, and treated him as a son. The facts are familiar, and we think it idle to recall them at greater length.<sup>1</sup>

This Bragadin, celebrated in Venice no less for the splendour of his name<sup>2</sup> than for his eloquence and his great

<sup>1</sup> *Mémoires*, II. 28–32.

<sup>2</sup> Possibly he was descended from Mark Antony Bragadin, the hero of

## CASANOVA AND HIS TIME

talents as a statesman, to say nothing of the erotic adventures which had signalised his unruly youth—this Bragadin “was silly enough,” as Casanova cynically says, “to go in for the occult sciences.”<sup>1</sup> With his two friends, Dandolo and Barbaro, patricians, bachelors, rich and idle like himself, he had for some time been applying himself to the secret enjoyments of cabalism. When he got well again, he eagerly attributed his salvation to miraculous influences, and insisted on regarding his saviour as a fervent adept in the hermetic sciences. The saviour took care not to disabuse him. On the contrary, he fortified him in his error, by telling him that he possessed a secret means of foretelling the future, and directing one’s-self in all the difficult circumstances of one’s life. He called it his “Oracle,” and pretended to have learnt it from an old Spanish hermit, offering to give an exhibition then and there. He gave it, and the dazzlement of Bragadin and his friends was completed.

Precisely in what did this oracle, which was to play so essential a part in Casanova’s life, consist? The explanations he gives are noticeably, and doubtless purposely, confused. The first time it occurs in his *Memoirs*<sup>2</sup> he defines it thus: Famagusta, who recited the *Miserere* while the Turks were flaying him: “rolled up in a sail and covered with his scarlet flag, his skin was brought back as *spolia opima*” (see P. Monnier, *Venise au dix-huitième siècle*, p. 8).

<sup>1</sup> *Mémoires*, II. 32.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, II. 33.



## CASANOVA'S ORACLE

“A numerical calculation by which, through a question that I wrote down and changed into figures, I obtained, also in figures, a reply which told me all I wished to know.” In course of time, we shall see him form, alone or with the aid of credulous spectators, pyramids of figures, then add up the columns, and transcribe in letters the numerical total. He was careful, following in that the prudent custom, to give only obscure replies with a double meaning, which, in one of its senses, was ingeniously arranged so as to be incomprehensible until after the event.

It was upon this illusive science that Casanova founded his credit, and notably in the case of the singular friendship with which he inspired the senator, Bragadin. With a sort of retrospective shame, he earnestly seeks to convince us that this imposture was not entirely his doing, but was actually suggested to him by the man who was to be its earliest victim. Nevertheless, it seems to us evident that he cannot have improvised at need, in so wide a sense, a method so perfect and so complex as his own. His whole past, the adventures that we have recalled, his love for mystery and intrigue, lead us to think that he had long prepared himself, by studying the Cabala and frequenting the cabalists, for the esoteric part which circumstances now offered him.

The strange intimacy which was established between the heretofore fiddler of the San Samuele theatre and a patrician



## CASANOVA AND HIS TIME

so notable as Bragadin did not fail to set the city agog, and the causes of their intimacy escaped nobody. So we learn from the police reports which brought about Casanova's arrest.<sup>1</sup> One of the "secret observers" who watched his conduct and rendered a detailed account of it to the Inquisitors, thus expresses himself in a note dated November 11, 1754:

"This man has always lived at his neighbours' expense, and cultivated people who are ready to believe anything. . . . He is an *iperbolano* (cabalist), and by dint of lies and a witty tongue, he lives at the charges of this, that, and the other one. He has been the ruin of the noble Zuanne Bragadin, causing him to believe that the Angel of Light was to reappear. . . ."

This note is signed Manuzzi, a personage whom we shall more than once again come across in the *Memoirs* under the name of Manucci, doubtless a copyist's error. Casanova did not love him, and we now can see that he certainly had at any rate some reason to distrust him, and can even explain his going so far as to accuse Manuzzi of having tried to procure his assassination.<sup>2</sup>

The reports for the year 1755 insist upon Casanova's

<sup>1</sup> These reports have been published by A. Baschet, *Preuves curieuses de l'authenticité des Mémoires de Casanova*, in *Le Livre*, January, February, April, and May, 1881.

<sup>2</sup> *Mémoires*, VIII. 10.

## FREEMASONRY

sorceries and on the mystery with which he surrounded himself in order to impose upon his dupes. Manuzzi relates in these words a visit that he paid to the *iperbolano* :

“He took from a box a small white skin in the form of a belt. I asked him what it was used for. He told me that it was employed when one penetrated to a certain place where there were chains, and where one wore black garments. I asked where the chains and the garments were. ‘In a cell,’ said he, ‘for it would be dangerous to keep them in one’s own house.’ I recollected then that Casanova had recently spoken to me of the sect of Freemasons, telling me of the honours to be had and the advantages of being a member. He said that the nobleman, Marco Donado, had thought of joining the sect, but that the manner of initiation had seemed to him too hazardous, and he had not wished to expose himself to it. One was led in with one’s eyes cast down. . . .”

The secret and impenetrable element in the practices of Freemasonry was sure to attract Casanova, and we shall see, in fact, later on, that he had not failed to become received as an adept into its ranks. But we shall better apprehend, now that we know all the singularities of conduct and language which are recounted in the spy’s notes, the pretext, if not the cause, which some months later produced his

## CASANOVA AND HIS TIME

arrest. A remark on the margin of a report dated August 21, 1755, says definitely that Casanova was arrested *principally in consequence of his public scorn for the Holy Faith.*

And that, to sum up, was his most palpable result, despite some successes and some questionable profits, from the chosen game of sorcery.

After his escape from the Piombi, when he resumes his vicissitous transit across Europe, it is again, despite the disillusion of his earlier efforts, by means of this worthless science that he seeks to "arrive."

He comes to Paris, preceded by an equivocal fame, wherein much distrust is mingled with some admiration. But spirits were in the air, so to speak; occultism was the fashion, and every kind of charlatan the darling vogue. Saint-Germain had already revolutionised the Court and the city; Mesmer and Cagliostro were on the way. Following a very illustrious example, all society-folk who respected themselves went to Bontemps to have their fortunes told, and Casanova went with them.<sup>1</sup> Had not the famous sorceress made prophecies to the Abbé de Bernis, with regard to the Pompadour, which had positively excited the King?<sup>2</sup> Had

<sup>1</sup> *Mémoires*, VI. 25.

<sup>2</sup> *Mémoires* of Mme. du Hausset, pp. 105-138.





CARDINAL DE BERNIS.

[To face p. 154.]





## OCCULT SCIENCES

she not announced to the future Cardinal, and to sceptical Choiseul himself, a part of their fortunes? The Parisian correspondence of the *Gazette de Leyde* relates with some irony a case of "illuminist madness" which is not without analogy with that of the Marquise d'Urfé, the dupe so skilfully exploited by Casanova. A lady gives a banquet to an invisible company, and believes that her park is haunted by spirits; the prudent man-in-the-case, a witness of her follies, having no desire to quarrel with the mistress of the house, leaves her without destroying an illusion which is the delight of her life.<sup>1</sup>

All the libraries were full of books about cabalism and the occult sciences; the *Monde enchanté* of Bekker was on the ladies' dressing-tables and the Ministers' desks; nor did any one talk of anything but elemental spirits, migrations of souls, and magnetism.<sup>2</sup>

Casanova easily caught the pitch, and played a brilliant part in the concert of absurdities. Unhappily for him, he was given to exaggeration, and as in addition he had the misfortune of a doubtful past, he soon felt the weight of suspicions or rancours which the majority of his brother-wizards escaped. The echo of his reputation reaches us a little later, in a report from M. de Beausset, French Minister at

<sup>1</sup> Funck-Brentano, *L'Affaire du Collier*, pp. 102, 103.

<sup>2</sup> See Gérard de Nerval, essay on *Cazotte et le Diable amoureux*.

## CASANOVA AND HIS TIME

Cologne, addressed to Choiseul. Casanova (he says) is a man more to be despised than dreaded; he saw, in Paris, a great deal of Mesdames du Romain and de Rieux, and *was at that time connected with fortune-telling and horoscope-drawing*.<sup>1</sup>

In reality, it was during Casanova's first sojourn in Paris (before he underwent his detention at the Piombi), in 1751-1752, that this reputation was achieved. Already in possession, at that time, of the secrets of his esoteric traffic, he had displayed them in the Court itself, by means of the credulity of the Duchesse de Chartres, daughter of the Prince de Conti.<sup>2</sup> This lady, of whom the crafty Venetian gives us an amusing kit-cat portrait,<sup>3</sup> had delicate features and a charming mind, and would have been a beauty if her face had not been covered with little pimples which completely disfigured her. Weary of apothecaries and quacks, she at length conceived the quite natural idea—for the society and the epoch—of demanding from the occult powers what she had not been able to obtain from science. She sent for Casanova to come to the Palais-Royal, and submitted to the clairvoyance of his oracle several questions concerning her malady and “affairs connected with her heart”—not very far removed from one another, we may

<sup>1</sup> A. Baschet, *Preuves curieuses, etc.*, p. 24.

<sup>2</sup> *Mémoires*, II. 384, *et seq.*

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, VI. 385.

## THE PIMPLES OF THE DUCHESS

conjecture. Our magician solemnly withdraws for a *tête-à-tête* with his "genie"; then makes his cabalistic pyramids, sets his figures in rows, and gives his answer. As he ingenuously avows, his replies were obscure about the matters of which he knew nothing, but clear about all that concerned the malady. His chemical knowledge, and a certain experience of his own of that kind of trouble, really did enable him to subject the Duchess to a treatment, or more exactly, to a *régime*, which soon brought about a sensible amelioration.

More extraordinary is the anecdote which follows this narrative. It is so piquant that Casanova could not resist the pleasure of making a second detailed report of it, all by itself, the manuscript of which exists in the archives at Dux. The tale is there told more at length, and with more malice too, than in the *Memoirs*.<sup>1</sup> We shall sum it up here, to show, by a fresh example, what an immense part chance and luck played in the cabalistic science of our Venetian.

After having interrogated the oracle on the subject of her pimples, and the best way to get rid of them, the Duchesse de Chartres put a final question: "What is the malady of the lady I am thinking of?" . . . This lady was none other than herself; but from prudence, and a desire

<sup>1</sup> See Symons, *Casanova à Dux*, in the *Mercure de France* for October, 1903.



## CASANOVA AND HIS TIME

to leave the oracle at liberty, she had not chosen to say her name. The reply did not tarry. "She wishes to impose upon her husband." The Duchess uttered cries of surprise and admiration; and a little while afterwards, Casanova heard from the mouth of M. de Melfort this story, which made his oracle appear of an aptness and penetration almost beyond belief.<sup>1</sup>

"Madame la Duchesse, pretty as you see, had her face so disfigured by pimples that the disgusted Duke had never been able to make up his mind to approach her conjugally; and so the poor Princess languished in a hopeless longing for motherhood. The Abbé de Brosses cured her by means of his pomade, and, her handsome face as smooth as satin, she went to the Queen's box at the Théâtre-Français. The Duc de Chartres, ignorant that his wife was at the theatre, whither she went but rarely, was in the front of the King's box. He did not recognise the Duchess, but he thought her handsome, and asked who she was. They told him, but, not believing it, he went to where his wife was, complimented her, and, on the same night, announced a visit from himself. What resulted was that, nine months later, Mme. la Duchesse gave birth to the Duc de Montpensier, who is now five years old, and a healthy boy. During her pregnancy the Duchess continued to have a smooth skin; but as soon

<sup>1</sup> *Mémoires*, II. 389, 390.

## MLLE. DE ROMANS

as her child was born, the pimples came back, and the pomade lost all its potency."

It is not hard to imagine the effect, even on unprejudiced minds, of the replies of an oracle so apt and intelligent, if they often accorded to this degree with reality.

More than once afterwards Casanova was as well served by chance. In passing through Grenoble, did he not predict to a girl of seventeen, Mlle. Roman-Coupier, that she would become the King's mistress, and was not this horoscope confirmed in every point no later than the following year? It is true that Casanova had sagely couched his prediction in these terms: "It is necessary that the monarch should see the young lady before she has attained her eighteenth year; for, after that age, her destiny will take a different turn." Needless to add that the lady and her connections saw that the time-limit was kept, in order that so dazzling a destiny should follow its natural course.<sup>1</sup>

With Mme. d'Urfé, who asked nothing better than to believe him, Casanova had not to take much trouble in disciplining his oracle; and he found in Holland, in the house

<sup>1</sup> On this story, see *Mémoires*, V. 21, 37, 344, and 363. Thanks to a portrait by Drouais, lately exhibited at the "Jeu de paume," the girl, who was really called Mlle. de Romans, has made her re-entrance to history. The reader will be interested by an article, "En marge," in the *Temps* (April 26, 1909), where a very agreeable writer resuscitates Drouais' model—"that last infatuation of Louis XV., who disturbed Mme. de Pompadour, and was the mother of the Abbé de Bourbon."

## CASANOVA AND HIS TIME

of his patron, M. d'O., dupes as complaisant and pupils as docile as she. For his great craftiness lay in making people believe that his science was easily picked up, and that he could quickly teach it to anybody whatever, provided that there was no doubt of its efficacy, and no mockery of his cabalistic doings. It was in this way that, notably, he drilled the Senator Bragadin and his friend Dandolo, the Duchesse de Chartres and M. de Melfort, M. d'O. and his daughter Esther, in forming pyramids of figures, and finding for themselves oracular replies to the questions that they had put.

Three times at least, in Amsterdam, luck served miraculously both master and pupil. Casanova was then training in cabalistic calculations that fair Esther whom he loved, and by this means procuring long *tête-à-têtes* with her, wherein magic played a smaller part than passion; while, killing two birds with one stone, he was at the same time gaining an ascendant over her father's mind, and dazzling him no less by his powers of divination than by the astounding aptitude which he had discovered in the lovely daughter.<sup>1</sup>

One day, Casanova admits quite simply that he saw, by chance, written on a paper, the question which was to be kept secret—and was thus enabled to prepare at leisure a reply which corresponded admirably with the terms of the

<sup>1</sup> *Mémoires*, IV. 12, *et seq.*



## A FAIR CABALIST

demand.<sup>1</sup> Another day, when on his way to M. d'O.'s, luck led him to notice on the staircase a green portfolio which he bent to pick up, but awkwardly let fall under a step, out of reach of any one's hand. The portfolio contained articles of value, and belonged to M. d'O., who had just missed it. On this occasion the oracle, on being questioned, had no difficulty in answering with precision, to the unbounded amazement of father and daughter, "that the portfolio had not been found by any one, and that it had fallen in the opening of the fifth step on the staircase."<sup>2</sup> Finally, when in the following year, M. d'O. consulted our sorcerer to know if he should negotiate an important financial affair with an individual who said he was the friend of the King of France, Casanova, who was aware of Saint-Germain's presence at The Hague and of the transactions in which he was there engaged, succeeded very easily, by means of his magical calculations, in disabusing the Dutchman, and persuading him that the pretended friend of the King of France was a vile impostor, with no credit and no official mission whatever.<sup>3</sup>

By such lucky hits it was that Casanova strengthened the power of his oracle. But with his candour, or, if the reader prefers, his habitual cynicism, he is the first to acknowledge that circumstance was kind to him, and that obliging

<sup>1</sup> *Mémoires*, IV. 14.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, IV. 23-26.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, IV. 196, 197. See our chapter on Saint-Germain.



## CASANOVA AND HIS TIME

combinations of the sort, joined to the blindness and infatuation of his public, were the principal cause of his success.

As to anything there may have been, not of scientific, but of traditional, in the divinatory doings of Casanova, it is somewhat difficult to make sure, for he took care to envelop them in a prudent mystery. The passage in the *Memoirs* where they are most clearly described does little to satisfy our curiosity : it is concerned with the initiation of the fair Esther into the secret beauties of the oracle.

“As a joke, I made her two magic squares which delighted her greatly. . . . My good genius put it into my head to make a cabalistic calculation for her. I told her to ask in writing something that she did not know and desired to be informed about, assuring her that by virtue of a certain calculation she would obtain a satisfactory reply. . . . I taught her to make her pyramid with figures got from words, and all the other ceremonies ; then I showed her how to obtain the numerical answer, which I made her translate by the French alphabet.”<sup>1</sup>

But whenever any one asked him the origin of this operation, his reply was almost always the same : either he had learnt it “from an old hermit,” or else he had found the secret in a rare manuscript, which he had burned.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Mémoires*, IV. 12.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, II. 33 ; and IV. 13.

## ARITHMANCY

In reality, the various proceedings of *arithmancy*, or divination by numbers, are, despite a certain appearance of scientific rigour, quite as delusive as those of *nephelomancy* (divination by clouds), for example, or *catoptromancy* (divination by mirrors), or *lampadomancy* (divination by lamps). They all assume an arbitrary attribution to figures of the value and sense of letters. According to the place given to the figures in the arrangement of the calculation—that is to say, in squares, circles, or pyramids—the operator can always obtain a phrase, which in its purposed obscurity will lend itself easily to the most diverse interpretations. The seven magic squares of Paracelsus, corresponding to the seven planetary spirits, are at the most but agreeable mathematical recreations; yet adepts not only maintain that by adding each column of these squares one will invariably obtain the same number—which is evident—but that this number will be the characteristic one of the planet, and that by finding the explanation of it by the hieroglyphics of the Tarot, one will be able to perceive the significance of all the figures, whether triangular, square, or cruciform, that can be formed by means of numbers; in short, that the result of this operation will be a complete and profound knowledge of all the allegories and mysteries hidden by the ancients under the symbol of each planet<sup>1</sup>—which seems, to

<sup>1</sup> See Eliphas Lévi, *Dogme et Rituel de la haute magie*, II. 332.

## CASANOVA AND HIS TIME

the profane, a good deal more debatable. We are, in fact, in full blast of esotericism. The Chaldeans, the Greek philosophers of the schools of Plato and Pythagoras, and the Jewish cabalists, were all much addicted to divination by numbers. The Greek Cabala derived its power from the letters of the alphabet combined with numbers, and the Great Cabala explained the most obscure matters by their means.

Each of the charlatans of fortune-telling did nothing more than revive, with many distortions, these great and ancient traditions; and Casanova's method must have been as good as any other, for it served him admirably. It is scarcely surprising, indeed, that, for all his jeers and cynical avowals, he should himself have been to some extent taken in. Familiar with the secrets of the Cabala, crammed with Paracelsus and the *Clavicules de Salomon*, a great reader of Nostradamus, of the *Enchiridion* and the *Theocratic Tablets*, he had besides a strong tendency to superstition; and this helped to render him impressionable to his own spells. He speaks incessantly, in the *Memoirs*, of his "tutelary genius," his "occult familiar," his "destiny;"<sup>1</sup> *à propos* of a lucky coincidence (really a very singular one), he asks his readers how, in the presence of such contrivances "of Providence, chance, or luck, as they call it,"<sup>2</sup> one *could* wholly escape

<sup>1</sup> Notably in I. 58, 323, 452.

<sup>2</sup> *Mémoires*, I. 220.



## THE "GREAT WORK"

superstition. And when he happened, in squaring his figures and translating them into whatever phrases his fancy happened to dictate, to find himself in accordance with the reality of things or the inclination of people, he was driven to believe either that things and people were amazingly obliging, or else that his calculations were not so delusive as they might possibly have seemed under less fortunate conditions.

### V

To acquire all his degrees as Master of Cabalism, Casanova had still one test to pass, and must now accomplish what specialists in the subject have called the *Great Work*. It was the Marquise d'Urfé who gave him the idea and the means of carrying out this operation; and if she became its victim—the word is exact, since she was to die of it—we must acknowledge that she made a willing one.

A strange and disturbing figure is that of this woman of the world, intelligent and crazy, of a nature at once generous and perverted, who brought all the fire and egoism of a sensual passion to the practices and rites of Grand Magic. But her craze was not entirely innocent, and certain contemporaries are more severe about her than Casanova is. One of them, Cazotte, in a letter written in 1791 to his



## CASANOVA AND HIS TIME

friend Ponteau, Secretary of the Civil List, enumerating, not without complacency, various pythoneses and notorious "initiates" of the age, cites the Marquise d'Urfé amongst those priestesses of the propaganda. "She was the *doyenne* of the French Medeas," he writes; "her drawing-room was always crammed with quacks and all sorts of folk running after the occult scientists;" and, further on, he blames her for having educated and evilly influenced the Minister, Duchâtelet.<sup>1</sup>

And yet if any one ought to have been indulgent towards the chimæras of the Marquise, surely it was Cazotte, whose farcical "illuminations" were neither less extravagant, nor less renowned. Did he not carry on, publicly, mystical relations with another lunatic of the kind, the Marquise de la Croix, one of the oldest and most fervent adepts of Saint-Martin? Illuminism united them in those entirely intellectual bonds which the doctrine regarded as a sort of anticipation of the life to come. One of the sons that Cazotte had by his marriage with the excellent Mme. Cazotte, the boy Scævola, imbued with the same esoteric convictions as his father, became, after a sort of initiation and symbolic consecration, the spiritual child of the aged Marquise. "The ardent woman made on the brow, lips, and cheeks of the young man, three mystic signs

<sup>1</sup> Related by G. de Nerval, in his study on Cazotte.

## MADAME D'URFÉ

accompanied by a secret invocation, and thus consecrated the future of him whom she called the *son of her intelligence*.”<sup>1</sup>

There is between this mystic pairing and that which Casanova formed with the Marquise d'Urfé, a very curious analogy. That their relations were as pure as those between Cazotte and the Marquise de la Croix is a thing that the lady's age would authorise us to suppose, but it is also a thing upon which the sharp tongues of the time cast some doubt. An echo of these malicious comments reaches us across the narrative of Lorenzo da Ponte, who relates in his *Memoirs, à propos of Casanova*, a somewhat confused tale from which one seems, nevertheless, to disentangle the episode of our Marquise.<sup>2</sup> According to this document, the victim of the subtle Venetian was “a very rich old lady who was said to like handsome young men.” In any case, Casanova seems to have done everything that was necessary to make his relations with Mme. d'Urfé less pure and less disinterested than was fitting for a mystic union; we read in the *Souvenirs of the Marquise de Créqui* “that he had persuaded her that she was to become pregnant, at seventy-three, by the influence of the stars and the cabalistic numbers; that

<sup>1</sup> See G. de Nerval, essay on Cazotte as preface to his edition of *Le Diable Amoureux*. Plon, 1871, pp. 61-64.

<sup>2</sup> See the following chapter on *The Stolen Jewels*.

## CASANOVA AND HIS TIME

she would die before being brought to bed, but would be re-born of her own volition as a grown girl at the end of seventy-four days. There was only one thing that must be guarded against, and that was, letting herself be put in a shroud and buried prematurely.”<sup>1</sup> And it was, of course, what happened.

Casanova relates, without the smallest embarrassment and with great wealth of detail, the magical operation which he attempted on the credulous Marquise. Moreover, to clear himself of responsibility, he takes care to represent his part as a pupil's rather than a master's, and to indicate that he was nothing more than a docile instrument in the hands of the old lady, much better versed than he in the practices and mysteries of the Cabala. In short, all he did in this episode, as in many others of his life, was to profit by the capricious favours of destiny, and yield to a very natural temptation. He gives us clearly to understand that Mme. d'Urfé, like the Senator Bragadin, was one of those feeble intellects who are condemned by fate to be duped and exploited; and concludes, on a pirouette: “As well I as another!”<sup>2</sup>

The grand chimæra of the Marquise was her belief in the possibility of entering into relations—or into “colloquy,” as

<sup>1</sup> See P. Monnier, *Venise au dix-huitième siècle*, p. 307.

<sup>2</sup> *Mémoires*, III. 483.



## CHIMÆRA OF THE MARQUISE

she called it—with the *genii*, or elemental spirits;<sup>1</sup> by her commerce with whom she hoped, besides, to obtain the privileges of regeneration and metamorphosis into a man, and thus to recommence a new life.<sup>2</sup>

A secret instinct, or rather the penetration of her familiar, had told her that she would find in Casanova the man best fitted to obtain for her these two prerogatives. He, sage fellow, knew better than to protest when she attributed to him not only the possession of the Philosopher's Stone, but also that of "colloquy" with all the elemental spirits, and the power of throwing the whole world into confusion by his magic knowledge.

"If I had believed that I could disabuse her," he writes, "and bring her back to a reasonable condition of mind, I think that I should have attempted it, and the deed would have been meritorious; but I was persuaded that her infatuation was incurable, and I thought I could do nothing better than second her folly and profit by it."<sup>3</sup>

One day the Marquise solemnly affirmed that her new friend could, by means of a cabalistic operation, "cause her soul to pass into the body of a male infant, born of the philosophic coupling of an immortal with a mortal, or of an ordinary man with a woman of divine nature."<sup>4</sup> This

<sup>1</sup> *Mémoires*, III. 480.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, III. 484.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, III. 483.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, III. 483.



## CASANOVA AND HIS TIME

was a ray of light for Casanova, who had been wondering, ever since the beginning of their relations, in what practical way he could utilise the confidence and the follies of the good lady. The things she said to him, the superstitions with which she was imbued, were neither more nor less unreasonable than those which were then current in the highest circles and most erotic alcoves of Paris. To quote the expression of a contemporary, ennui had reduced everybody to lunacy, and public opinion was ready for any improbability.

Casanova's life at this time, his relations with Mme. d'Urfé, the operation which he was about to attempt, the durable and lucrative reputation that he made for himself—all offer a great analogy with the career and the success which awaited Cagliostro some thirty years later. Every one knows the amazing vogue which the notorious charlatan enjoyed in Paris at the end of the eighteenth century. All the women wore his portrait; he pretended to cure nearly every known ailment; sold a liquid which had the virtue of keeping those who drank it for ever at the same age; evoked the dead, and gave interviews to the highest personages in the State, in the posture of an inspired sibyl. The journals of the time reported gravely, with corroborative proofs, his marvellous cures and triumphant spells.<sup>1</sup> For his evocations

<sup>1</sup> See Funck-Brentano, *L'Affaire du Collier*, Chap. x.

## CORTICELLI

he usually employed a “*voyante*,” or medium; this had to be a young girl of great purity, with high-strung nerves and blue eyes, and she must be born under the constellation of Capricorn. He found her in the person of Marie-Jeanne de la Tour, niece of the Comte de la Motte.<sup>1</sup>

For his attempt at the regeneration or *hypostatis* of the Marquise d’Urfé, Casanova, too, needed an accomplice. He sought her for a long time, and finally selected a young woman whom he had met at Bologna; she was a “super” at a theatre, and was called La Corticelli.<sup>2</sup> Casanova, who had very agreeable memories of her, resolved to make her pass as the divine virgin whose co-operation was necessary to the great work. And yet he had some weighty reasons for preserving no illusions on the point of her virginity. Scruples of that kind, however, did not arrest him. In a few days the comedy was planned, and the Corticelli was quite ready to play a somewhat different part from that which had been confided to her at the theatre in Bologna.

She was at Prague when her old friend wrote, explaining what he demanded of her; in the same letter he sent her fifty louis, and directed her to come and meet him at Metz, where he would await her.<sup>3</sup> When she arrived, Casanova,

<sup>1</sup> Beugnot, *Mémoires*, I. 58; and Funck-Brentano, *L’Affaire du Collier*, Chap. x.

<sup>2</sup> *Mémoires*, V. 180 and 310.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, V. 404–406.

## CASANOVA AND HIS TIME

who had not seen her for some time, found her greatly changed for the better: "She had grown; her contours were more defined, and her graceful manners completed the effect of a very pretty girl."<sup>1</sup> The metamorphosis was perfected by washing away the Corticelli's vulgar name and plebeian origin; she was decked out with a borrowed title, and became, for the good cause's sake, the Comtesse Lascaris, sole remaining scion of the illustrious family which had reigned in Constantinople. Thus transformed, she was perhaps not even yet the supernatural virgin of whom Mme. d'Urfé had dreamed . . . but a musical and resounding name, and five centuries of ancestors, conferred upon her all the requisite apparent majesty. Moreover, Casanova drilled her solicitously at every point.

The Marquise awaited them at Pont-Carré, an old castle about four leagues from Paris. She received the mock countess with marks of ineffable respect and tenderness, and was the more persuaded that she was about to be born again in the child conceived by this sublime virgin—for thus she expressed herself—as, by a marvellous coincidence, the family of d'Urfé was allied to that of Lascaris.

The date of the operation was fixed on the fourteenth day of the April moon, and it took place in all the forms prescribed by the magic ritual. We refer the reader to the

<sup>1</sup> *Mémoires*, V. 408.



## A CAT

narrative in the *Memoirs*, which spares us no smallest detail ;<sup>1</sup> we there behold Casanova officiating with as much apparent conviction and dignity as at Cesena, in the treasure-comedy ; but this time his assistant was no longer the amiable and innocent Javotte. He was now dealing with a profligate and rapacious damsel who would be sure, if she was to be made into a catspaw, to show her claws in the process.

On the last day of the moon, our prudent sorcerer feigned to interrogate his oracle as to whether the operation had succeeded, and his union with the “ virgin ” Lascaris were to prove fruitful. He took care to make it reply that all was lost, by the fault of an intruder, who, hidden behind a screen in the nuptial chamber, had been present at the celebration of the mysteries. They must try it all over again, but this time away from France, and during the May moon. By this subterfuge he gained time ; and it was decided with one accord to go and spend some days at Aix-la-Chapelle, and there renew the attempt.

Until then, despite some sallies, the Corticelli, feeling that she had everything to gain by a feigned docility, had lent herself with a good grace to the passive rôle. But soon this happy state of things altered. The perfidious counsels of her mother, some unsatisfied caprice, and the malign desire to avenge herself on Casanova, possibly also the vague

<sup>1</sup> *Mémoires*, V. 411 et seq.



## CASANOVA AND HIS TIME

hope of a bigger personal gain—all decided the mock countess to wreck the well-set scheme. When the moment fixed by the oracle for the second experiment had come—it was, to be precise, the day of the full moon at three minutes past four—the divine Lascaris was found writhing in her bed and feigning convulsions, which put the operator in the position of being able to do nothing whatever. Neither prayers nor threats could make her yield.

It was a heavy blow ; but Casanova managed to parry it, thanks to the prestige of his oracle, which he always invoked in critical moments. The voice of supernatural wisdom said, with great tact, that the fair Lascaris had been polluted by a black spirit, an enemy of the Order of the Rosy Cross, that she would become pregnant, not of the child in whom the Marquise hoped to be re-born, but of a gnome, and finally that these events had turned her brain—a very natural conclusion, and one which, by pronouncing her mad, would prejudice beforehand anything she might say, if by chance she were found to have too long a tongue. For the rest, Casanova took the earliest opportunity of getting rid of so compromising a witness.

This fresh failure did not discourage the old Marquise. Her patience was as wonderful as her credulity, nor had the subtle Venetian come to the end of his resources. But he needed a new accomplice, and discovered her at his elbow,

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## AN EXPERIMENT

as it were. She was the daughter of a French officer. Her name was Mlle. d'Aché; he designates her as Mimi, and was, of course, in love with her. How he persuaded Mme. d'Urfé that she must write to the moon and ask advice; how he organised himself the burlesque correspondence; how he made Selene reply that the operation must be postponed to the following spring, and take place at Marseilles; how, finally, he induced the worthy dame to take with her as far as Colmar the enchanting Mimi, now become the divine virgin protected by the friendly spirits—must be read at full length in the *Memoirs*; among all the comedies invented by the ingenious magician to mystify his dupes there is none more joyous. The correspondence between Selene and the Marquise is the occasion for an admirable piece of stagecraft, whose perfection is a proof that Casanova had not wasted his time when he frequented the initiates and read the cabalistic books. With even more scrupulous care and virtuosity than at Cesena did he arrange the experiment, whereof the apparent rigour was well calculated to seize the exalted imagination of a feminine adept. Nothing was forgotten—neither the aromatic plants and essences which please Selene and are part of the cult, nor the magic prayers and cabalistic words which assist the evocation, nor the vapours of juniper rising mysteriously around the moon-rays. Immersed in the same bath of lukewarm, perfumed water,

## CASANOVA AND HIS TIME

in the open air, amid the dim effulgence of the night, Casanova and the Marquise must have cut a strange figure. *He* had great difficulty in preserving his gravity when, long afterwards, he evoked the memory of the prodigious prank. He reveals to us, with no false shame, the trick of the letter, explaining how the lines, traced in silver upon glazed green paper, were reflected on the surface of the water, which was luminous with the moonbeams; he had taken care to hide the paper in his hand, and the credulous Marquise never for an instant doubted that Selene's answer had fallen straight down from the sky.

For the rest, she was still undiscouraged by the answer, and the magic sentence which ordered her to wait until the following spring for a third attempt. Casanova persuaded her that they ought to separate until the destined date. He saw the good lady off to Lyons, and started himself for Geneva—wholly unregretful; in the favourable hour they were to meet again at Marseilles.<sup>1</sup> And here the philosophic confidence of La Fontaine's charlatan finds a vivid confirmation :

*" Avant l'affaire, le roi, l'âne ou moi, nous mourrons."*

It was the Marquise who died.

Casanova heard of her death in a letter from that Mme. de Rumain to whom, if we are to believe the reports of M.

<sup>1</sup> *Mémoires*, V. 443, 444.



## AN EXTRAORDINARY WILL

de Beausset, he had not disdained to tell fortunes.<sup>1</sup> She informed him that, according to her maid and the doctors, Mme. d'Urfé had poisoned herself with too strong a dose of the "panacea." In an extraordinary will that had just been opened, she left all her property to the first child whom she should bear, and of whom she declared herself to be then pregnant, and she named Casanova as guardian of the infant.<sup>2</sup> Far from showing himself sensible of this supreme proof of that tenacious affection and confidence, our sorcerer-out-of-work was troubled only by the thought of the ridicule which the posthumous fantasies of his victim might draw down upon him. He has not a word of regret or sincere emotion for the poor lady. If he *was*, to use his own phrase, "broken-hearted," it was because this tale, in which his name was inevitably mixed up, was of a kind to set Paris laughing for a week; he knew right well that he would pay dearly for the scandal. Never was franker cynic.

But another detail of this death interested him—and that was the question of money. He had been sure that he had got all possible profit from the long intrigue, and had rendered the Marquise impotent to leave him anything on her decease—not even a regret for a fortune which costly extravagances and rascally exploiting must have reduced to nothingness. It was with surprise that he learned that her

<sup>1</sup> See *ante*, p. 156.

<sup>2</sup> *Mémoires*, VI. 451.



## CASANOVA AND HIS TIME

estate amounted to four hundred thousand francs, apart altogether from landed property ; and surprise was changed to anguish when he further heard that the whole had been instantly confiscated by the Marquise du Châtelet, her daughter. This last news robbed him even of the temptation to push his rights as “guardian,” and of any hope of profiting by the posthumous liberalities of the Marquise d’Urfé. So he hastened to “concentrate his grief and remorse” on more immediate interests—and we may be sure he was quickly consoled.

No likelihood, either, of his delivering a stately funeral oration on the woman who held a larger place and played a wider part in his life than the most constant of his mistresses : that kind of gratitude does not belong to his character. And it must be admitted that it would have been a little embarrassing for him to comment freely on a death which delivered him from a perilous undertaking. When Saint-Germain spoke to him of the Marquise and her recent end, he avoided replying, and reports without commentary of any kind the hypotheses and reflections which that end suggested to his interlocutor.<sup>1</sup>

The relations of Casanova with the Marquise d’Urfé, so conveniently interrupted by this providential demise, were very near having a further development. When he came

<sup>1</sup> *Mémoires*, VIII. 71. See our chapter on Saint-Germain.

## THE NEPHEW

back to Paris, the adventurer one day attended a concert, and there heard his name mentioned behind him, with great shouts of laughter. He turned; a tall young man was speaking of him with contempt, and regarding him fixedly while he did so. Among other things, he affirmed that Casanova had stolen at least a million from his late aunt, the Marquise d'Urfé.<sup>1</sup> Our Venetian was not the man to allow to pass thus an accusation so direct and public. Reckless of scandal, he retorted with an insult, then left the hall, and went into the street to await the imprudent nephew, from whom he intended to demand satisfaction for his speeches. But the other did not come . . . or Casanova did not wait long enough. At all events, the duel never came off. More than one threatening situation, in this tumultuous career, was similarly dealt with.

The accusations of the disappointed heir supply us with the last word in the story of Mme. d'Urfé. It is too certain that, while playing the wizard with so much apparent conviction and perseverance, Casanova was again in quest of nothing but his own immediate interest. It is difficult to calculate precisely what this long adventure was worth to him. But the Marquise's credulity was, together with play, his chief source of income for several years; not only did he live for a considerable time with her—her hanger-on, as it

<sup>1</sup> *Mémoires*, VII. 362.

## CASANOVA AND HIS TIME

were—profiting by her table and her luxurious way of life, but, under various pretexts, cleverly adapted to her fantasies, he got from her large sums of money. She had partly entrusted him with the care of her fortune; continually she would put in his hands either paper to negotiate or jewels to sell. The confidence and generosity of the nobleman Bragadin were as nothing compared with hers; moreover, Casanova was sure to pay himself back generously for all the mummies and expedients to which the folly of his dupe reduced him. The worst of it is that he does not seem to feel the slightest remorse for his conduct. He recounts the different acts of the comedy with as much geniality and good grace as he details a lucky night at play or a love-affair. Nor can we urge, in this instance, as we have urged for many a peccadillo of his youth, the plea of a superstitious and frivolous nature which is easily caught in the snare of its own humbugging absurdities.

### VI

The portrait which we have endeavoured to trace of this enigmatic man, by recalling the principal episodes of his life wherein mystery mingled with intrigue, would be incomplete if we neglected to point out the curiosity and sympathy awakened in him by what he has called “the sublime trifling of freemasonry.”



## FREEMASONRY AS A PASSPORT

Inevitably, the esoteric proficiency, the initiation, all the somewhat theatrical staging of freemasonry, attracted this daring mind. Moreover, the vast secret society, which had adepts all over Europe, was a power with which an adventurer of this class was bound to reckon: might he not find therein a support in case of need, or a passport to many circles which otherwise would be closed to him? Plainly it was such positive reasons, and the dread of occupying an inferior place in society, which most influenced his determination; and when he decides to become a mason at Lyons, in 1750, he lays bare his calculations without the least embarrassment.

“A well-born young man who wishes to travel and see the world, and who does not desire in certain circumstances to find himself at a social disadvantage among his equals, and thus be excluded from their pleasures, ought to become initiated into what is called freemasonry.”<sup>1</sup>

At that time freemasonry, which comprised a large number of lodges of very different characters, and had many initiates in every rank of society, presented itself especially as a beneficent and “fraternal” institution. Possibly it may have served as a pretext for criminal enterprises; but in its origin, it had neither the importance nor the form that gradually, in the course of the eighteenth century, it acquired

<sup>1</sup> *Mémoires*, II, 289.



## CASANOVA AND HIS TIME

through the stupid persecutions of the Church or of Princes.

In Italy, and in Venice—so as to keep an eye on our Venetian—we find Goldoni producing, during the Carnival of 1753, a comedy, *Le Donne Curiose*, which is nothing more than a witty portrayal of the supposed mysteries of a masonic lodge.<sup>1</sup> A Venetian merchant, Pantalone, has rented a little house where he is wont to assemble some of his men-friends at supper, and talk over the news and business of the day. Women are excluded from these reunions, and this is enough to make them curious and suspicious. They make the most varied guesses at the object of these mysterious gatherings. One thinks that their husbands meet to play high; another, that the little house is a rendezvous for courtesans; a third, that the men are trying to find the Philosopher's Stone. They end by buying Pantalone's servant-man, who promises to let them in some evening. And so behold them hidden in a little room whence they can comfortably observe all that is to go on in the big one. Their curiosity is quickly satisfied and their illusions dispelled, if not disappointed. In the middle of the supper they make an irruption into the banqueting-room and throw themselves on their husbands' necks, asking pardon for their unworthy suspicions.

This comedy had the greatest success. Every one

<sup>1</sup> See the *Mémoires* of Goldoni, Chap. xvi.





COUNT CAGLIOSTRO.

[*To face p. 183.*]

## A NEW FORM OF MASONRY

recognised at once the picture of those secret meetings which were becoming so usual in Italy, and the Venetians openly declared that if Goldoni had really found out the secret of the Freemasons and given a faithful exhibition of it, Italy would be very wrong in proscribing them. Casanova said the same in his *Memoirs*, but less disinterestedly.

Italy, and Venice in particular, was not to be long so indulgent towards freemasonry. Less than thirty years later, in 1781,<sup>1</sup> an incendiary fire having broken out in the Arsenal of Venice, suspicion fell upon a masonic lodge. It was raided by the police; the insignia and papers were seized, exposed in the Square of Saint Mark, together with the list of masons—and finally burnt.

This sudden change in public opinion and in the attitude of the authorities was due principally to the extensive spread in Italy of a new form of masonry under the influence of Cagliostro. That illustrious impostor had thoroughly grasped (better than Casanova had) the advantage he might derive from these secret associations, by subjecting them to the power of his sorceries. He undertook to “reform” freemasonry according to the Egyptian ritual, from details that he had found in London among the papers of one George

<sup>1</sup> We take these details, and those which follow, from an interesting article by G. Bourgin on Italian Freemasonry in the Eighteenth Century, in the *Revue historique* for July–August, 1907.



## CASANOVA AND HIS TIME

Coston. He felt, too, that something might be done with the women, until then proscribed from the masonic meetings, and admitted them to the "Egyptian" lodges. His wife was Grand Mistress of the Lodge of Isis, which contained a number of women from the highest circles.<sup>1</sup>

The Papal Power was roused by this movement. It saw in masonry not only a centre of infidelity whence the adepts of diabolism might draw new strength, but also a grouping quite contrary to the theocratic principles of the old régime.<sup>2</sup>

Cagliostro founded in Rome, at the Villa Malta, near the Pincian Gate, an Egyptian lodge in which the ritual was purely fantastic.<sup>3</sup> A selected public, comprising notably the Cardinal de Bernis, and the Princesses Rezzonico and Santa Croce, assembled there to admire the juggleries and trickeries of the master-charlatan and his imitators. There was nothing revolutionary or satanic in these meetings; nevertheless, they brought about the arrest of Cagliostro, on December 27, 1789. His trial lasted two years. Every one knows that he was condemned to death, and that the penalty was commuted to that of perpetual imprisonment by Pope Pius VI. Incarcerated in the fortress of San Leone,

<sup>1</sup> Funck-Brentano, *L'Affaire du Collier*, pp. 95 and 104.

<sup>2</sup> G. Bourgin, as before.

<sup>3</sup> H. d'Almérás, *Cagliostro*, p. 130, *et seq.*

## CASANOVA AS MASTER-MASON

Cagliostro there died in August, 1795—impenitent to the last, and doubtless mad.<sup>1</sup>

If we have somewhat lengthily recalled this episode of masonic history in Italy, it has been to explain the comments of Casanova upon an institution in which he desired to take a part. Accepted as an apprentice-mason in a lodge at Lyons, thanks to the intervention of a “respectable personage” whose acquaintance he had made at M. de Rochebaron’s, he became in Paris, some months later, a companion and Master-Mason. He considered the Master-Mason’s to be the supreme degree: “all the others,” he says, “which I was made to take later, are merely agreeable inventions which, though symbolic, add nothing to the dignity of Master.”<sup>2</sup>

With great energy he defends the true masonry from all accusation of political intriguing, and declares that any criminal enterprises for which it may have provided a pretext were the work of “rogues and vagabonds” of the kind which manage to insinuate themselves into the most impeccable societies. And in conclusion he dwells lengthily upon the harm that princes do to themselves, and the good that they do to freemasonry, by their persecutions of it.<sup>3</sup>

There remains the mysterious element—somewhat puerile,

<sup>1</sup> G. Bourgin, as before.

<sup>2</sup> *Mémoires*, II. 289.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, II. 290, 291.

## CASANOVA AND HIS TIME

in truth—of the initiation and the ceremonies. Casanova admits that it impressed him; and how could it have been otherwise with a man whose cabalistic knowledge and practices were almost on a par with those of Cagliostro?

“The effect of these things on the profane,” he writes, “that is to say, on those who are not masons, is of the same sort as, long ago, those individuals experienced who were not admitted to the mysteries celebrated at Eleusis in honour of Ceres. . . . Mystery is in the nature of man, and everything which presents itself to the public in a mysterious aspect will ever pique curiosity and become an object of investigation, however persuaded people may be that the veil, in many cases, conceals mere nothingness.”<sup>1</sup> This latter phrase contains, under a philosophic appearance, the most piquant and ironic of apologies for the spells and sorceries to which Casanova owed a large part of his success. Like all the other mysteries in his life, the masonic one was merely another “way of getting there.”

Like Cagliostro, Casanova was to die impenitent, for he preserved to the last years of life his passion for intrigue and love of mystifying his contemporaries.

We know that after being restored to favour with the Inquisitors, whose secret agent he became, our incorrigible

<sup>1</sup> *Mémoires*, II. 289, 290.



## THE EARTHQUAKE

adventurer managed, in eight years, to excite anew the hostility and rigour of the Government. He was obliged to exile himself a second time, in 1782, and he never saw Venice again.<sup>1</sup> But he revenged himself in characteristic fashion. Here is the amusing story which, in May, 1783, the French Secretary in Venice, one Schlick, told to Vergennes:<sup>2</sup>

“Last week there reached the State Inquisitors an anonymous letter, announcing that on the 25th of this month an earthquake more terrible than that of Messina would destroy Venice utterly. This got out, and spread panic through the city. Several patricians have left the capital, and their example will be followed by others. . . . The author of the anonymous letter . . . is a certain Casanova, who wrote it from Vienna, and contrived to slip it into the Ambassador’s very own packet.”

This somewhat tasteless joke attests, not only Casanova’s rancour against the patricians, but also his invincible fancy for duping others by a parade of empty knowledge. It is all of a piece: sorcerer and prophet, cabalist and soothsayer. The earthquake phantasy was his oracle’s last deliverance, nor is it the least ingenious. The oracle had made his fortune for him—and now it was to make his revenge.

<sup>1</sup> On the events which caused this second exile, see Baschet, *Preuves curieuses, etc.*, p. 54.

<sup>2</sup> A. Baschet, *Preuves curieuses, etc.*, p. 108.



## CASANOVA AND HIS TIME

Finally, the adventurer's cabalistic acquirements, after having helped him to a fruitful career, were to ensure him a comfortable retirement. It was in 1784, two years after his second quarrel with the Republic of Venice, that Casanova made the acquaintance, in Paris, of Count Waldstein, nephew of the Prince de Ligne; he was presented to him at the Venetian Ambassador's by his friend, the Abbé Eusebio della Lena. They liked one another from the first. The Count believed firmly in the Cabala; "not in the way Casanova did, for what it might be worth to him, but as a very fervent adept."<sup>1</sup>

This common liking for the cabalistic learning was the bond of union, or rather the Venetian seized upon this new acquaintance as his final victim. He was getting old, and was weary of perpetual exile and of a career which age and the burden of a dubious past were not likely to render any more secure. It seemed to him that the hour had come to make a distinguished exit to retirement. The Count Waldstein arrived opportunely to continue the succession of Bragadin and the Marquise d'Urfé. He admirably did so. Casanova became his librarian at the Castle of Dux, in Bohemia, where he died, fourteen years later, aged seventy-eight.

<sup>1</sup> A. Baschet, *Preuves curieuses, etc.*, pp. 106, 107.



CASANOVA IN OLD AGE.

[To face p. 188.]



## CASANOVA ON HIS CAREER

Cabalism can do anything. It gained for its adept, in addition to some brilliant triumphs and solid benefits, an almost dignified end—a very different one, at all events, from the miserable downfall which might have been expected. And, writing his *Memoirs*, at the age when there is nothing to lose by being sincere, he several times acknowledges that he owed a great part of his resources, and his whole reputation, to his genius for intrigue and the prestige of his sorceries.

“My career,” he says, “despite its apparent brilliancy, did not rest on a very solid foundation;”<sup>1</sup> and again: “I could not, with any grace, declare myself the foe of adventurers, for I feel that I was something of the same sort myself; and I am bound to pass lightly over the lies of others, since, more or less, all adventurers are impostors.”<sup>2</sup>

Thus his abounding love for Paris, and his frequent and lengthy sojourns there, are accounted for by the fact that Paris is the “one town in the universe where the blind goddess dispenses her favours to those who yield themselves up to her, and know how to profit by doing so”<sup>3</sup>—in short, it is a Land of Cockaigne for the adventurer.

Amid a society passionately interested in all the chimæras of occult science, Casanova utilised the valuable faculties which his earliest education and the hazards of his destiny

<sup>1</sup> *Mémoires*, V. 155.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, V. 48.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, III. 340.



## CASANOVA AND HIS TIME

had given him. Treasure-finder and fortune-teller, quack and sorcerer, cabalist and charlatan, he tasted the subtle joy of fooling fools and duping dupes, always taking care to get paid for his operations in both kinds. If the pseudo-Chevalier de Seingalt had thought, in later life, of making himself a coat-of-arms, might he not well have included in his blazon, between a woman's silhouette and a pair of dice, the wand of the magician and the retort of the alchemist?

**CHAPTER IV**  
**THE STOLEN JEWELS**



## CHAPTER IV

### THE STOLEN JEWELS

The misadventures of an adventurer; his collaborators and accomplices.

I. A valet who knows too much: Costa—The extravagances of the Marquise—Quérilinte, Principal of the Rosy-Cross—A story of watches and snuff-boxes—Costa disappears—The cheat cheated.

Twenty years after—Costa reappears—Casanova pardons.

II. Lorenzo da Ponte as Casanova's judge—A "collaborator of Mozart"—A quarrel about Latin prosody—Story of the rich old lady—Robber or robbed?—A prophetic dream—A meeting at Vienna—Casanova retrieves Costa—Mercury reconciles the two knaves.

III. An old debt—Advice at two sequins.

IN reading Casanova's *Memoirs*, one is not more amazed by the audacity and variety of his undertakings than by the insolent success which accompanied them. Love, gambling, intrigue, the Cabala, all smiled upon him in turn, making him suffer no hardships except the inequalities of luck or trifling blows to his vanity. More than once, it is true, we see him in a sorry plight: his temerity, want of foresight, and cynicism led him sometimes to the very verge



## CASANOVA AND HIS TIME

of having to expiate cruelly the fancy of a day. We behold him ruined, ill, threatened with a savage duel, trapped, imprisoned in the blackest cells. Was a brilliant career like this to end with any one of such accidents, the accidents which daunt, and yet are native to, mediocre spirits? No; for at the moment when his ruin seemed imminent, his energy, his pluck, his charm, or his graceful manners—in a word, his “*genie*”—once more pulled him through.

He has such a delightful confidence in the power of his charm and wit! How could Fortune, being a light woman, fail to respond invariably to the engaging glances of so subtle a seducer? He had one weakness, though, this conqueror; and that was, to reckon overmuch on the fidelity and discretion of others in intrigues whereby only himself was to profit. He seldom failed; but we may be sure that he would invariably have succeeded if he had not confided a part, however small, to such questionable supers, in the complicated drama of his existence. We know with what ease and apparent conviction he could be led away by all, both men and women, who knew how to flatter him. This spirit led him to make the worst errors of calculation, the most dangerous mistakes. It was always such accomplices, selected and made use of in an utterly casual manner, who came near to ruining him. Thus, Balbi delays and endangers his escape from the Piombi; the Corticelli betrays

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## COSTA

his confidence, and exerts herself to undeceive the Marquise d'Urfé; the perfidy of a servant, Costa, reduces him to the very verge of ruin. This last episode is worth narrating, inasmuch as we possess, to throw light upon and explain it, another account besides that in the *Memoirs*.<sup>1</sup>

### I

Casanova had with him an Italian servant named Costa, for whom he had a remarkable affection, and who really seemed to deserve it by his apparent fidelity, and the very genuine services he rendered to his master. Casanova had taken him into his service at Parma. Costa's father was a needy fiddler, burdened with a family, whose sad situation had touched the sympathies of the adventurer. Was there not a certain analogy between the fate of this poor man and the humble past of the Venetian? It recalled to him his youthful days, when, to gain a living, he scraped a violin in the theatres of Venice, until the hour when the nobleman, Bragadin, fell providentially into his arms. He had vague dreams of being a Bragadin on a small scale to this young Costa, amiable, intelligent, and shrewd, and thought he would make his fortune while attending carefully to his own.

<sup>1</sup> *Mémoires*, V. 314, 337; and VIII. 218, 507.

## CASANOVA AND HIS TIME

So, even though he had dismissed him one day at Parma, he had the weakness to take him back from pity, and bring him with him to Paris. A jealous servant, who wished to get into his good graces again, warned him then that the boy was a rogue, and would play him some ugly trick.

"He is not a libertine," he said; "he is sober, and does not like bad company; but I believe him to be a thief, and a dangerous thief, especially as he is so scrupulous about robbing you in smaller ways. Monsieur, remember! you will be his dupe. He is waiting to make his grand *coup* for the moment when he has secured your confidence."

Wise words! which were to be confirmed in a most startling manner. Casanova despised this advice; and he was wrong, as he recognised later on. We see him next in Paris, accompanied by Costa, and much occupied in gaining the confidence, and earning the gifts, of the Marquise d'Urfé. That good lady, quickly infatuated with her new charmer, did not know how to repay the fair promises of a man who had undertaken to regenerate her. She kept him sumptuously. Casanova made his patroness's money fly, and following the example of de la Bruyère's Philémon, "denied himself no sort of splendour, like a young man who has married a rich old woman." He completely replenished his wardrobe, which had suffered in all the vicissitudes of his career; then, luxuriously fitted out,

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## CASANOVA AT MUNICH

he bought himself some jewels. He had always had a weakness for precious stones; these—rubies and diamonds—were destined to ornament the cross of Saint Jean-de-Latran, of which, he declared, he had been made a knight by the Pope.<sup>1</sup>

He was always, moreover, well provided with pocket-money, and could make a good show at the faro-tables.

It was evidently the fatal hour, marked by a wise augur, which his servant was awaiting in order to ruin him. In the winter of 1761, having nothing to do in Paris, and being obliged to put off temporarily the great operation which he was about to attempt upon Mme. d'Urfé, Casanova left for Strasbourg, and from there went to settle in Munich. The pretext for the voyage was the obtaining of the release of Quérilinte, one of the three Heads of the Rosy-Cross, who was imprisoned in the cells of the Inquisition at Lisbon. The deliverance of Quérilinte was, it appears, necessary for the success of the Great Work. It goes without saying that the Marquise promised to help with all her influence and resources. Casanova was not allowed to start without a big "letter-of-credit," and a provision of watches and snuff-boxes, small presents meant, as he said, to bribe the persecutors of Quérilinte.

Apparently the watches and snuff-boxes caused a delay.

<sup>1</sup> *Mémoires*, VI. 90.



## CASANOVA AND HIS TIME

Casanova had not the patience to put off his departure, so he left behind him, in Paris, the faithful Costa, who was to receive from the Marquise's own hands the money and jewels, and rejoin his master in Munich. Costa was also to bring the beautiful embroidered clothes which the tailor had not yet sent, the fine linen, the diamonds, a "good trunk" to hold them all, and the famous ruby and diamond cross. Finally he was given, for his own personal use, a hundred louis, which was more than enough for the necessities of the voyage. He considered this honest profit very little reward for having served, till then, with scrupulous fidelity, a master like Casanova. So, having received the well-filled trunk, he hastened to leave Paris for an unknown destination, taking with him this undreamed-of fortune.

Casanova long awaited him at Munich. When he had lost all hope of seeing him arrive, and heard no word of any kind from the Marquise, he realised that he had been tricked, betrayed, and ruined, and remembered too late the advice he had been given at Parma. The blow was all the harder because he was at this very moment in an extremely tight corner, and the jewels and money would have been none too much to get him out of his difficulty. Vexation, anger, despair, raged in his soul, always quick to feel the extremes of both good and bad fortune. It was only the announcement of an unforeseen piece of luck that consoled

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## ROBBED BY COSTA

him: Mme. d'Urfé had not had time to give Costa, who was in such a hurry to leave Paris, the bill of exchange for fifty thousand francs, and she sent it direct to her *protégé*.

Even deducting the bill of exchange, the sum of Costa's thefts remained enormous. The victim estimated them at fifty thousand crowns, which was perhaps a slight exaggeration. Casanova, who had so keen a desire for display, particularly regretted his embroidered clothes and his diamond cross. At all events, he hoarded up the remembrance of this robbery, and longed for revenge: humiliated by having been so grossly deceived by a menial whom he had raised from misery, furious at losing a share of the profit which he had laboriously gathered by his own knavish tricks, he naturally could not well forgive the thief.

The tenacity of his anger appears in the epilogue to this misfortune. Twenty-three years later, in 1784, he came upon Costa in Vienna—Costa, now valet to the Count von Hardegg,<sup>1</sup> after a most lamentable odyssey, worthy in every way of his former master. He had come to Italy in a brilliant equipage, decked out in the spoils of his robbery, and had married in Rome the daughter of a Papal sweeper (*sic*), whom he reduced little by little to utter poverty, and ended by abandoning. The proceeds of his theft had been

<sup>1</sup> Or Erdich; compare *Mémoires*, V. 314; and VIII. 219.

## CASANOVA AND HIS TIME

easily captured by clever sharpers, who had drawn him into a gamble.

Casanova learnt all these details from the mouth of the unhappy rascal ; he drew them from him one by one with a sort of cruel satisfaction, delighted to abash his despoiler, to behold him again in the degrading precariousness of his original destiny, and to feel, in short, that it only depended upon himself to take his full revenge. He thought of it, and sincerely wished to hang the scoundrel. But the tears and repentance of the culprit, the intervention of an honest man, and one knows not what undercurrent of sympathy for vice and blackguardism, disarmed him. He pardoned him, but not without stating that he considered it a piece of heroism on his part. Let us take his word for it, and listen now to the account of a disinterested witness, who was actually mixed up with this noble act.

### II

He is called Lorenzo da Ponte, and his life is no less variegated than Casanova's. Like him, he rushed all over Europe, and played all sorts of parts. Together with him, and with Antonio Longo, Pietro Antonio Gratarol, and Goldoni, he offers a curious specimen of those Venetian adventurers who delighted in recounting their careers, and

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## LORENZO DA PONTE

whose memoirs are no less varied and lively than the adventures themselves.

Those of Ponte, written in Italian, have been honoured by a French translation, and actually by a preface from Lamartine!<sup>1</sup>

It came about thus. This rival of Casanova, who was but a mediocre adventurer, was a fairly good rhymester, and had the luck, or the brilliant inspiration, of associating his frail reputation with the solid glory of a great master. He styles himself, pompously, "the collaborator of Mozart"—because he wrote two librettos for that delightful composer's operas. We owe him the *Nozze di Figaro* and *Don Giovanni*. It was this happy accident which drew him from the obscurity and misery wherein he was vegetating. Until the day whereon his arrival in Vienna, and the subsequent patronage of Metastasio and Salieri (director of the Italian Opera to the Emperor Joseph II.), changed his destiny, he had lived through adventures which offer more than one point of resemblance with Casanova's. Like him, he had started life with the intention of becoming a priest, and even a preacher; like him, had finally abandoned the idea of taking Orders, and gone to seek his fortune in the gambling-dens and *casini* of Venice; like him, had had blazing love-

<sup>1</sup> The translation is by C. D. de la Chavanne, published by Pagnerre, Paris, 1860.



## CASANOVA AND HIS TIME

affairs with the most notorious courtesans of the Republic, as well as with fugitive princesses; like him, found his principal resource in gaming; and, like him, met with a rich old gentleman whom he bewitched with his personal charm, and cared for only as a thing to plunder. Let us add, to complete the likeness, that he had a quick and acid wit, and that he wrote satirical verses against the Most Serene Republic. He was denounced to the Inquisition, and on the point of being arrested; only a hasty flight saved him from going, like Casanova, to ponder in the Piombi upon the unwisdom of satire and debauchery.

We shall surprise nobody when we say that da Ponte did not like Casanova, and believed that he had a right to despise him. He knew him so well, and resembled him so closely! They had made acquaintance in 1777, in Venice, at the houses of Zaguri and Memmo, who both delighted in Casanova's conversation. It was after his restoration to favour with the Inquisitors; and although he had become the secret agent of the Republic, and had accepted, to make quite sure of his pardon, the shady offices of a spy, our adventurer carried his head in the air and was once more among the prosperous in the land. He had not retrieved all his former boon-companions, but he had soon resumed all his former habits, frequenting the gaming-hells, the cafés, balls, and *casini*. He spoke loud, and a gibe was ever on the tip

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## A QUARREL ABOUT PROSODY

of his tongue ; he took part in all political, literary, or social discussions, put in his oar about everything, and, despite his brilliancy, quickly became insupportable. To such a degree, indeed, could he exasperate by his indiscretion, vanity, and obstinacy, that he was ere long obliged to seek refuge in a second voluntary exile from the rage and rancour of one maddened patrician. Da Ponte did not escape the slings and arrows of this outrageous combatant. They had a violent quarrel—and about what? About Latin prosody. They came to daggers drawn about it, after a puerile debate.<sup>1</sup> We here retrieve Voltaire's arrogant guest who, undazzled by the prestige of the Patriarch of Ferney, had wrangled with him victoriously upon the most varied topics.

Da Ponte admits the difficulty there was in justly estimating a man in whom intelligence and perversity were almost equally mingled. Nevertheless, he makes us feel pretty strongly that he did not like him. He knew a good many scandalous tales about him, and gladly reproduces them ; he had already told them to his wife—and, as a consequence, to the public. *well, well* Among these anecdotes there is one which Casanova "would take very good care not to tell in his *Memoirs*" (or so his improvised biographer declares), but which da Ponte thinks it would be a pity to lose to the world. So he presents it to us with evident satisfaction. Here is his narrative at full

<sup>1</sup> L. da Ponte, *Memoires*, p. 206.

## CASANOVA AND HIS TIME

length, for it would be deplorable to impair by the slightest omission so savoury a dish :—<sup>1</sup>.

“Casanova’s passions were strong, and his vices numerous. To satisfy both, he needed a great deal of money. When he ran short, he did not despise any means of procuring it. One day, when he was even harder up than usual, he was presented to a very rich old lady who was said to like handsome young men. Informed of this weakness, Casanova began to warble at his sweetest, and surrounded her with all sorts of little attentions, finally arriving at a declaration. But the lady, whose too-faithful mirror showed her every day new wrinkles accumulating on her brow, and who feared that the *beaux yeux de sa cassette* were more alluring than her own, most mercilessly resisted. Casanova then conceived the idea of confiding to her as a great secret that he possessed the art of rejuvenating a woman, and restoring to the most decrepit all the splendour of her ’teens. He offered to give her an irrefutable proof of this. The wondering lady received the confidence with unspeakable delight, and said she would like to try. Instantly, without losing a second, Casanova betook himself to a courtesan, to whom he promised a smart sum if the farce in which she was to play turned out a success. He painted wrinkles on her face and dressed her up in such a fashion that she was

<sup>1</sup> L. da Ponte, *Mémoires*, pp. 203-205.



## THE WATER OF YOUTH

totally unrecognisable; then took her to the lady, whom he had, as a measure of precaution, advised to send her servants out of the way. He presented his 'subject,' who looked at least seventy, and, murmuring some unintelligible words, drew from his pocket a phial of which he made her drink the contents. According to him, it was a miraculous philtre, which was to produce the grand metamorphosis. He made the pretended old woman lie down on a sofa, and covered her with a black cloth, which would enable her to get rid of her disfigurements; some minutes later, she sprang into the middle of the room, displaying herself to the dazzled eyes of the lady in all the radiance of her beauty. The stupefaction of this latter can more easily be imagined than described. She embraced, she hugged the girl; she overwhelmed her with questions, to which the answers were subtly given; but Casanova, dreading a more ample explanation, hustled the young woman out of the house. Returning to the lady, he found her in a state of feverish enthusiasm. She fell on his neck, opened a wardrobe and showed him gold and diamonds, assuring him that these treasures should be inseparable from his hands, if he succeeded in rejuvenating *her*. Casanova, who had arranged for just such a conclusion, set about accomplishing the miracle, for the foolish lady had consented to let him try. He made her drink the philtre, down to the very last drop—alas! this time it was not a



## CASANOVA AND HIS TIME

harmless liquid, but one in which he had mingled a dose of laudanum. He stretched her on the same sofa, and covered her with the same cloth. She soon fell fast asleep under the narcotic; then, letting her snore at her ease, he hastened to break open the wardrobe, take possession of the coffer containing the jewels, put out the lights, and, loaded with gold fly to find his servant, who was a sort of Don Basilius and had long been in his service. He had been ordered to await his master in the street; and as Casanova had perfect confidence in him, he entrusted him with the coffer, and told him to go to a hostelry, ten or twelve miles from Paris, where they should retrieve one another.

“It is said that there is honour amongst thieves; and evidently it is true, since Casanova, who had not recoiled before so infamous an action towards an entirely trustful lady, thought himself bound to take to his accomplice, the courtesan, that fifty louis which he had promised her.

“While they were congratulating each other on the credulity of their victim, his precious valet was hastily getting out of the country with the treasure. The fifty louis for the courtesan were all that Casanova had as yet deducted from it; so that he was now without a sou. After having vainly explored all the hostelries in and around the city, and given up hope of retrieving servant and treasure,

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## SIMILARITY OF TWO STORIES

he cursed the old lady, the courtesan, and himself—himself, so apt at duping others, and yet so simple as to have been taken in by a man whom he had always looked upon as an idiot.”

With a little more perspicacity, and assuredly a little more honesty, than are shown by da Ponte, the reader will easily recognise in this narrative the Marquise d'Urfé episode. It is all there, or nearly all—the old lady's fortune, her craze for rejuvenation, the magical operation promised and attempted by Casanova, the complicity of the courtesan (who is none other than the Corticelli), the theft of the jewels, and the perfidy of the valet. On two points, it is true, the stories differ: in the first place, there is no mention of the Marquise's infatuation for cabalism and the cabalists; in the second, the money and jewels embezzled by the servant are not given to Casanova, but stolen by him. We do not hesitate to attribute this last rascality solely to the rancour and antipathy of the narrator. As to the crazy infatuation and consequent practices of the Marquise, they constitute an attenuating circumstance for the adventurer, and that is why da Ponte is silent upon so essential a point—one which was known to all, and which, moreover, would have sufficed to identify for all his readers the “very rich old lady” whom he does not name.

Pursuing our study, we find in da Ponte's narrative

## CASANOVA AND HIS TIME

another episode which offers a still more striking and curious coincidence with the text of Casanova's *Memoirs*.

Da Ponte was in Vienna, perched, by favour of Salieri and Mozart, on the highest step of fortune's ladder, and filled with scorn, as was only natural, for the class of needy and unscrupulous adventurers from which he had but just emerged. One night he dreamed that he saw Casanova, and that Casanova showed him the most touching affection. The dream was prophetic; nor should this surprise us, since we have but newly left, with the good Marquise, the domain of the marvellous.

Next morning, in effect, da Ponte, still possessed by his dream, was walking in one of the public gardens of Vienna in company with Salieri, when he noticed, sitting on a bench, a strange old man who was staring fixedly at him. This old man was none other than Casanova, who now rose hastily and threw himself on the neck of his whilom enemy, lavishing upon him the most lively demonstrations of friendship.

"He who believes in dreams," adds da Ponte after recounting this touching scene, "is said to be a fool; but what is he who does *not* believe in them?"<sup>1</sup>

The pair of Venetians saw much of one another in Vienna. They forgot for the hour their ancient feud, and took pleasure in lounging together. Da Ponte opened his

<sup>1</sup> L. da Ponte, *Mémoires*, p. 207.



## CATCHING THE THIEF

purse-strings for Casanova ; Casanova opened his heart for da Ponte. The one lavished the money which he now obtained easily and almost honestly ; the other gave in exchange the counsels of his vast experience. And da Ponte perceived that he would do well to follow some of them.

In the course of their walks, da Ponte one day saw Casanova frown blackly and rush after a man whom he seized by the collar and apostrophised thus : " I've got you, you thief ! " An interested, and soon an amused, crowd collected round them. Da Ponte, growing uneasy, intervened and drew his friend away. Casanova, still boiling with rage, explained that the man was none other than Costa, the perfidious Costa, the valet who had stolen the Marquise's money and jewels from him, and who, ruined in his turn by intrigue and debauchery, had returned to his former state, and was a lackey in the service of a great gentleman of Vienna.<sup>1</sup>

This scene accords perfectly with that which is briefly reported in the *Memoirs* of Casanova, and dated 1784. Most of the details match : the encounter in Vienna, the date, the persistent rancour of Casanova, the lamentable odyssey and final fall of the valet. But here is a detail which Casanova does not record. *He* confines himself to saying that he

<sup>1</sup> L. da Ponte, *Mémoires*, pp. 207, 208.



## CASANOVA AND HIS TIME

pardoned his robber from pity, from nobility of soul, while da Ponte assigns the reconciliation to quite another cause. His version is that master and servant were reconciled like pickpockets at a fair, the one buying the discretion of the other.

“Casanova, *you* have stolen!” wrote our valet, who had a sense of style; “I but followed your example. You are my teacher; I am your mere disciple. Hush it up! ’tis your best plan.”

This sage note, which was brought to him by a waiter from the café wherein Costa had taken refuge, produced a great effect on Casanova. Not only did he cease to talk of having the thief hanged, but he went to him, took him by the hand, talked familiarly with him; and when they separated, they were the best of friends. Returning to da Ponte, that gentleman observed that Casanova was wearing a cameo ring which he had not been wearing when he left. The cameo represented Mercury. It was probably the last vestige of the twice-stolen jewels.<sup>1</sup>

It will be seen that da Ponte’s narrative, despite his prejudice, affords us valuable details and hitherto unknown documents which complete the Casanovian story. It is indeed a most piquant circumstance that, in seeking to reveal to us, for pure malignity, an adventure which Casanova

<sup>1</sup> L. da Ponte, pp. 208, 209.

## GOOD ADVICE

“would have taken care not to tell,” da Ponte should contribute a new argument in favour of the authenticity of the *Memoirs*.

### III

Some years after the scene which we have just recounted, the two adventurers met again for the last time.

It was in 1792. Da Ponte, going from Trieste to Paris, made a *détour* by Vienna in quest of Casanova, to reclaim a sum of some hundreds of florins which he had lent him. He found his debtor, but, perceiving that he was by no means prosperous, did not dare to recall the debt. When he set off again for Dresden, Casanova offered to accompany him, and went as far as Töplitz, “ten or twelve miles from the domains of Count Waldstein, whose secretary and steward he then was.”<sup>1</sup>

He was a chastened and a quieter Casanova. On the way, he lavished good advice on his companion. “If you want to do well,” said he, “do not go to Paris; choose London; but, in that city, be careful not to set foot in the *Café Italien*, and, above all, not to sign any document.”

The advice was not bad. It is true that it cost da Ponte two sequins, which Casanova demanded for his return journey

## CASANOVA AND HIS TIME

to Dux. We retrieve in this triple recommendation the memory of the disagreeable adventures which had marked our adventurer's English sojourn—perhaps the severest and most profitable lesson of his life. But his experience was to profit no one else: da Ponte, who did not follow the counsel, and was sorry for it, spent his two sequins in vain.

Such are, with some details of less importance,<sup>1</sup> the documents afforded us by da Ponte in support or otherwise of Casanova's *Memoirs*, and in completion of the illustrious adventurer's portrait. These anecdotes, recounted with evident malice, have nevertheless enabled us to add a new chapter to an existence already so fertile in records of every kind—and, among these, the episode of the Stolen Jewels is by no means the least significant.

<sup>1</sup> Da Ponte speaks notably (p. 202) of the detention of Casanova in the Piombi. He attributes it to a novel cause: the adventurer (he says) was arrested on the accusation of a lady, who complained that he gave her son Voltaire and Rousseau to read. He escaped, says da Ponte, at the end of eight or nine years. These details are obviously fabricated.

## CHAPTER V

### THE EPISODE OF LA CHARPILLON





## CHAPTER V

### THE EPISODE OF LA CHARPILLON

Casanova in contemporary literature—A Casanovian novel—Casanova in London in 1763—Mlle. de Boulainvillier, *alias* Mlle. Anspergher, *alias* "La Charpillon"—Advice from Lord Pembroke—The rendezvous that did not come off—La Charpillon in her bath—More promises and more delays—Vain strategy—The MOMENT—An unforeseen obstacle—The barber-lover—Casanova cured.

*La Femme et le Pantin*—La Charpillon and Conchita Perez de Garcia—The fatal hour—The two women and the two puppets—Refined perversity.

It would be an amusing exercise to distinguish, among our story-tellers and novelists of the last century, such as had profitably read the *Memoirs* of Casanova—those lengthy and detailed confidences which seem so peculiarly fitted to enkindle the ardour and stir the imagination of all writers on the look-out for human documents. In one of his latest novels,<sup>1</sup> H. de R gnier presents us with a type of fervent Casanovian, and points out what a prodigious mine of subjects the *Memoirs* are. "Such a book as could be written on the rascal!" . . . The book has not yet been

<sup>1</sup> *Le Pass  Vivant*, Mercure de France, 1905.

## CASANOVA AND HIS TIME

written; we still await, among many other delightful chapters, that to be entitled: "The Marriages that did not come off"—of which so seductive a sketch figures in the *Passé Vivant*. We shall probably await still longer the racy costume-play which, under the title of "The Youth of Casanova," is to revive all the tumultuous and tragic folly of eighteenth-century Venice. Doubtless it will lie dormant for ever in the desk of the erudite Lauvereau . . . But at all events, H. de Régnier's fine novel must have gained for Casanova a whole phalanx of new readers. Those who have not been satisfied with merely turning over the five thousand pages of the *Memoirs*, will assuredly feel recompensed for their more attentive and patient reading by greater actual joys than the mere effrontery of the details, or the genuine charm of the style. The historian and man of letters will be able to record several of those discoveries which amply reward an inquiring spirit for any trouble; I, for my part, in the course of that vivid experience, have made many unexpected "finds"—and "finds" which will be new to others besides myself, despite the learned critical studies to which the *Memoirs* have already given birth. I would here indicate one of these.

The sixth volume of the *Mémoires*<sup>1</sup> contains, among other

<sup>1</sup> In the Garnier edition (8 vols.).

## LA CHARPILLON

episodes, an account of the sojourn which Casanova made in London in 1763. This period of his life marked, as he himself observes with a bitterness quite unfeigned, the beginning of the end of his amorous career—till then so exceptionally brilliant. A woman, the strangest and most terrible, perhaps, of all those who traversed his unstable existence, was to take upon herself to give him the definitive lesson which no masculine vanity can gainsay. His, however, put up a good fight. Accustomed to meet with few shy women, and no recalcitrant ones, Casanova exasperatedly struggled with a wily and impudent minx, who made him pay dear, in every sense of the word, for a semi-victory that left him more wounded and fooled than satisfied and flattered. In very truth, this bold, adroit damsel, who first made him doubtful of his power of seduction, until then irresistible, deserves a place apart in the gallery of his happy and unhappy love-affairs.

She was passing, at this period of her life, under the name of La Charpillon, which she had made illustrious in Paris, London, and all profligate Europe, by her resplendent beauty and adventures. But Casanova had met her in former days, when she was called, according to the day or the occasion, Mme. de Boulainvillier or Mme. Anspergher. She was



## CASANOVA AND HIS TIME

thirteen years old when she saw Casanova for the first time. He could not then have guessed the part which this little girl, already pretty and coquettish, was one day to play in his life. It was in Paris; Casanova was in a jeweller's shop with his then mistress, the beautiful Baret, for whom he was buying a lot of trinkets. Near them, a young girl, accompanied by a duenna, was looking wistfully at a pair of paste-earrings which were evidently too costly for her purse. For the three louis that they cost, Casanova purchased a charming smile from lips and eyes which had already interested him. He loved to give pleasure, sometimes for the giving's sake, though generosity was one of his most usual methods of seduction. This instance of it was to cost him, in the event, more than three louis.<sup>1</sup>

The damsel of the earrings was the first to recognise Casanova, when they encountered one another, four years later in London, at the house of a Flemish officer. Doubtless he was less changed than she. The dazzling bearer of the name of Charpillon was then in the bloom of her seventeenth year.

“Her hair was of a beautiful light chestnut colour, and of astonishing length and luxuriance; her blue eyes had both the languor natural to that hue, and the full brilliance of an Andalusian woman's; her faintly rose-tinted skin was

<sup>1</sup> For this scene, see *Mémoires*, IV. Chap. v.

## A WARNING

of dazzling fairness. . . . Her shoulders were, perhaps, a shade narrow, but of perfect modelling ; she had white, soft, slim hands, a little longer than most people's, together with the prettiest feet, and that stately and graceful movement which can make even an ordinary woman charming. Her sweet, open face was the soul of candour, and seemed to promise all that delicacy of feeling and exquisite sensibility which are ever irresistible weapons for the fair sex."<sup>1</sup>

All this was more than enough to enkindle the ardent Casanova, who decided without delay to add to his collection a conquest which he believed would prove an easy one : the beauty was anything but shy, and fairly notorious adventures had seriously impaired a reputation about which, indeed, she no longer troubled herself. She was known, in short, to be capricious, sensual, and venal. London gossip, though, had some rather unexpected tales to tell of her, sufficient to cause a less resolute admirer than Casanova to hesitate. *He* committed the error of despising a timely warning which came from one of his friends, Lord Pembroke.

"The girl," said this gentleman, "had inspired me with a violent passion ; and one evening, meeting her at Vauxhall with her aunt, I made her an offer. . . . She accepted it, but on the condition that I should give her the money in

<sup>1</sup> *Mémoires*, VI. 485.

## CASANOVA AND HIS TIME

advance, which, like a fool, I did. She walked with me for a while, but almost directly dropped my arm, and I never got near her again the whole evening.”<sup>1</sup>

Casanova, who knew nothing of such defeats, probably laughed in his sleeve at so humiliating an adventure. He may even have conceived from it a degree of scorn for Pembroke. How much better for him if, hearing, he had renounced the idea of this conquest, and thus avoided letting a passing curiosity exasperate itself into a frantic passion !

When he went for the first time to La Charpillon's abode, he encountered the shock of finding with her three old women, her mother and her aunts, who were not entirely unknown to him, for they had done him out of six thousand francs at Geneva, four years before. This first impression was vexing, and the rest of her surroundings did nothing to dissipate it. Three rascally fellows, announcing themselves as family friends, played an unequivocal part in the agreeable circle. But Casanova was bold enough and foolish enough not to be driven away ; he stayed, dined badly, was cheated at play, and left, after the girl had invited herself to supper with him two days later.

She came on the day appointed, but not at the hour fixed, for at nine o'clock in the morning she was with him.

<sup>1</sup> *Mémoires*, VI. 486.



## THE FIRST FAILURE

Her errand was a "business" one; that is to say, to ask him for a hundred guineas—which would make the family's fortune. He, still impassioned and imprudent, promised to give a positive answer after supper, and in the meantime began to make love to the young lady.

"Assuming the caressing and daring air of an enamoured man desirous to reach the zenith of happiness, I made vain efforts, and obtained nothing, though I had, as it seemed, every prospect of doing so. But, supple as a snake, and well practised in her arts, La Charpillon escaped me, and ran away, laughing, to her aunt. I followed her, constrained to laugh too, and she held out her hand, saying, 'Adieu—till this evening.'"<sup>1</sup>

But in the evening—the same scene. In vain Casanova promised the hundred guineas, in vain he saw again "every prospect" of obtaining their value. All was without avail, and the beauty declared plainly: "You will never get anything from me either by money or by violence; but you may hope for all things from my liking when I shall once have found you as gentle as a lamb in a *tête-à-tête*."

Such is the first act of the comedy, the action of which develops amid many and various catastrophes. We shall recount only the most entertaining of them.

Three weeks later, the favourite aunt of La Charpillon

<sup>1</sup> *Mémoires*, VI. 490.



## CASANOVA AND HIS TIME

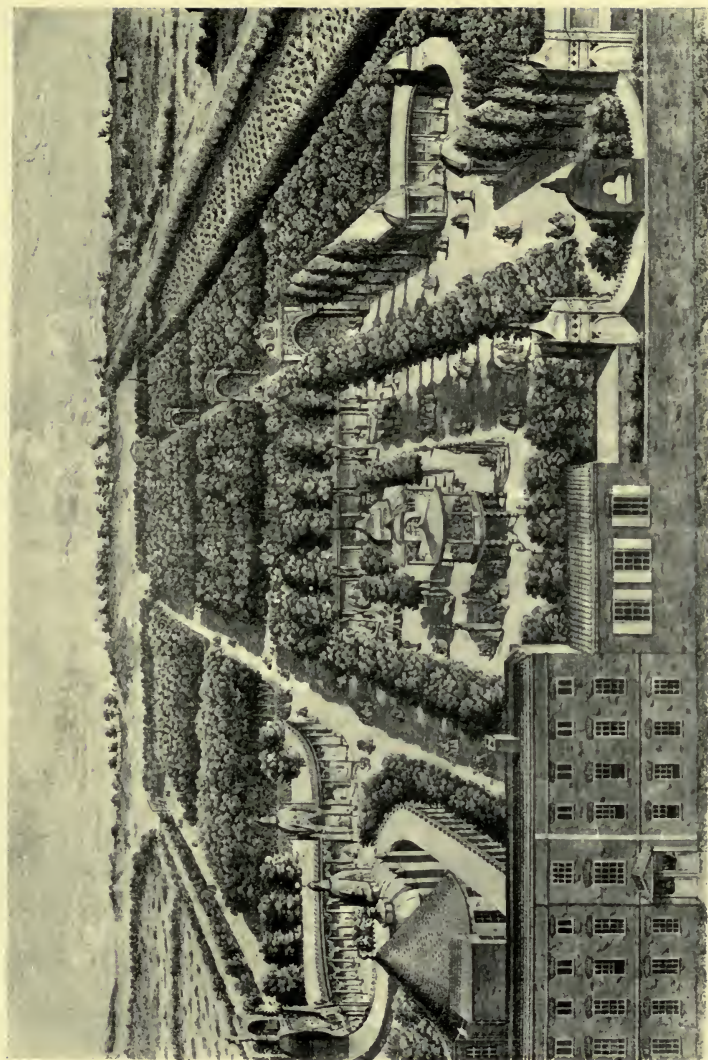
comes, as an ambassador, to see Casanova, and begs him to go with her to her ailing niece, whose whims and excessive modesty she thus excuses: "The dear child is frolicsome and a little wilful, and will only give herself when she is sure of being loved. . . . She loves you, but is afraid that *your* love may be only a caprice."

Naturally, Casanova had not gone so far in so mad an enterprise to be now stopped in mid-career. He follows the aunt, and (she accessory) penetrates to a room where La Charpillon is occupied, as it happens, in taking a bath—an admirably arranged scene, the issue of which could not be doubtful. We here refer the reader to the text of the *Memoirs*.<sup>1</sup> He will there learn how Casanova, once more duped, humiliated, and crushed, in circumstances where it might have appeared certain that he must be victorious, was left precisely where he already stood, and could but beat a retreat after a wholly illusory satisfaction.

Five or six days after the scene of the bath, just as he was succeeding in keeping away from the capricious beauty and perhaps beginning to forget her, he meets her by chance at Vauxhall. He makes her come to his table, and, after some speeches from her in which he thinks he perceives a little regretful tenderness, proposes a turn in the dark alley.

"She answered gently, and apparently sincerely, that she

<sup>1</sup> *Mémoires*, VI. 493-496.



VAUXHALL GARDENS.

[To face p. 222.]



## A SCOLDING

wished to be mine entirely, but not like that ; and, moreover, only on the condition that she should have the pleasure of seeing me at her abode every day, as a regular friend of the family.

“‘I promise ; but give me a little proof of your tenderness first.’

“‘No—no—NO!’”<sup>1</sup>

After this fresh refusal, Casanova went home, furious, and resolved to abandon his enterprise for good. But he was not cured. Upon the advice, and by the intervention, of Goudar, one of the “family friends,” a singular type of rascal who plays a most curious part all through this adventure, he offered La Charpillon’s mother a hundred guineas, if the daughter would yield. With the next morning, the daughter was at his door. Outraged dignity incarnate, she read him a lecture on the brutality of his proceedings.

“‘There is no question of bargaining. The only question is whether you imagine you have a right to insult me, and whether you believe that I am insensible to such an outrage. . . . I wish to remind you that I said you should never win me either by violence or money, but only when you had made me fall in love with you by your behaviour. Have I broken my word ? It is you who have broken

<sup>1</sup> *Mémoires*, VI. 497.



## CASANOVA AND HIS TIME

yours—first by coming and surprising me in my bath, and now yesterday by making that brutal suggestion to my mother.’ ”<sup>1</sup>

A compact was concluded between them. Casanova was to return, as a visitor, to La Charpillon’s abode ; patiently, slowly, he was to pay his court, and tame a heart which declared itself to be sensitive and delicate ; a fortnight was accorded him in which to make himself agreeable and acceptable. If he succeeded, at the end of that time, the beauty would no longer be cruel—and she went away, leaving Casanova more in love than ever, having obtained not even a kiss.

We shall pass over the stage in which the details of the compact were rigorously observed on both sides. The day of payment arrived. All was prepared . . . had the MOMENT struck at last ?

The scene of the bath was repeated, with some amazing variations. To the end, La Charpillon victoriously resisted.

Casanova left the house and went home to bed, where he stayed for several days, refusing to see any one or to read any letters. Two weeks went by.<sup>2</sup> One day, La Charpillon

<sup>1</sup> *Mémoires*, VI. 503.

<sup>2</sup> We omit the episode of the armchair, which does not directly concern our story. If any one is curious about it, it will be found in the *Mémoires*, VI. 511.

## FURTHER NEGOTIATIONS

came to see him, and humbly acknowledging her misdemeanours, undertook to explain her conduct. As her supreme argument she showed him the visible marks of his just resentment. But Casanova remained insensible to this spectacle, as to the tears and prayers of the damsel; she had to return as she had come, surprised and mortified by her disdainful reception. Nevertheless, Casanova had consented to negotiate with the mother once more: he was to take a little house where the girl was to retire alone, far from her family, and he was to go and visit her. A sum of money and a monthly allowance were to indemnify the mother for the sacrifice which she was supposed to be making. The document was drawn up, every arrangement was made—and behold Casanova master of the beauty at last.

Or so one would imagine. But his experience altered only to be more the same. . . . After a rather heated argument, La Charpillon received some well-merited blows, and Casanova abandoned the battlefield, though not without a hope of return.

In effect, the game was prolonged for some days further, always with the same promises, the same attempts, and the same final failure—indeed, there is actually some little tedium about this part of the *Memoirs*.

But here is the upshot of it all. After having twenty times nearly killed the creature who was only his mistress

## CASANOVA AND HIS TIME

by halves, and who offered herself with an impudence that equalled her skill in escaping him—after having gone, in one and the same day, through all the torments of hate and the transports of love, Casanova one night surprised La Charpillon alone with a young barber who was not contenting himself with putting her hair in curl-papers. A frightful scene ensued ; furniture and crockery were smashed, there was a regular fisticuffs, and the girl, almost naked, fled shrieking through the streets of London.<sup>1</sup>

The next day, Casanova, appeased if not happy, learnt that La Charpillon had returned to her home, mad with terror, and gravely ill. A too-well played comedy led him to believe that she was at the point of death. Despairing, tortured by remorse, he made up his mind to kill himself. He was on his way to the Thames, when he met a friend who succeeded in carrying him off instead to a gay supper-party, and inducing him to finish the evening at Ranelagh, where he perceived, dancing a minuet, that La Charpillon whom he believed to be dead, and for whom he had been on the point of dying.<sup>2</sup> This time he was really cured. There remained with him only a disagreeable memory, and the pleasure of the revenge whose recital occupies the sixth volume of the *Mémoires*.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Mémoires*, VI. 531-533.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, VI. 536-545.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, VI. 555-558.





RANELAGH HOUSE AND GARDENS.

[To face p. 226.]





## AN EVIL DAY

We do not suppose that the reader has awaited the end of this analysis to undergo the impression of the "already seen," or "already read," and to perceive emerging, beside the feminine figure which we have essayed to revitalise through Casanova's testimony, the dusky silhouette of Conchita Perez de Garcia, heroine of the novel by Pierre Louys entitled *La Femme et le Pantin*.

When Casanova, and when Don Mateo Diaz, begin the story of their singular ill-luck, and tell of their first meeting with the woman who was to ravage each of their lives, they both make, in differing words, an identical reflection :—

"The day on which I met this woman was an evil one for me, as my readers will be able to judge. It was towards the end of September, 1763, that I made La Charpillon's acquaintance, and it was on that day that I began to die. If the perpendicular line of ascent is equal to the line of descent, and as to-day is the first of November, 1797, I feel that I may count on about four years longer of life, and they will pass very quickly, according to the maxim : *Motus in fine velocior*." <sup>1</sup>

"Sir, there is in the youth of fortunate people an actual instant wherein the luck turns, the downfall begins, the

<sup>1</sup> *Mémoires*, VI. 484.

## CASANOVA AND HIS TIME

‘bad time’ arrives. So it was with me. . . . I date from that one moment my present way of life, my moral ruin, my degradation, and all the wreckage which you can read in my face.”<sup>1</sup>

The action is prepared, engages, and develops itself similarly in *La Femme et le Pantin*, and in Casanova’s *Memoirs*; the divers episodes of the novel are excellent replicas of the various catastrophes which we have just analysed; similar temperaments, similar passions, lead by an identical path to an analogous end. Assuredly, if this be imitation, it is imitation wholly free from servility—but it is rather revocation than voluntary and conscious copying. In quite different surroundings—surroundings far better adapted to the facts than those of Casanova—and, moreover, with the individual resources of his sensibility and imagination, Pierre Louys has, as it were, transposed and retold an adventure through which another had actually passed. Strange! of the two narratives, Casanova’s is assuredly the only one which is veracious, in the narrower sense of the word, and yet it is the less vivid, less “probable,” less arresting, of the two. La Charpillon, more profligate and more venal, interests us less than Conchita, whose sensuality has at least some appearance of sincerity. Both the women play the same cruel game, with an equal art to enslave and torture their

*at about  
men?*

<sup>1</sup> P. Louys, *La Femme et le Pantin*, p. 64.

## “LA FEMME ET LE PANTIN”

victim; but in the Spanish one there is the excuse and the charm of a real passion. The superiority and originality of Pierre Louys are beyond question in all concerning the psychological grasp of the subject—if one can speak of psychology in the study of a “case” which has almost nothing to do with the soul. His mastery is equally undebatable in the setting, the sustained interest of the story, the adaptation of the characters to the scenery—and in all the purely descriptive portions of the work.

From the *Memoirs*, Pierre Louys has taken the outline of the subject—all the series of subterfuges, pretexts, ruses, imagined by the girl to give colour to her refusal, after incessant promising, of the definitive embrace which the reader breathlessly and enervatingly awaits for more than a hundred pages. The scene of the seduction, the first visit of the lover to the girl, the earliest attempts and earliest promises, the successive evasions, the scene of the bed, that of the iron grating, where “Le Morenito” plays the same part as the amorous barber—a host of details which any attentive reader will at once recognise, and which it would be inconvenient to recapitulate here, fortify sufficiently the juxtaposition on which we have ventured. Any one who is interested in a greater precision will easily complete our notes by a comparative reading of the *Memoirs* and the novel.



## CASANOVA AND HIS TIME

The analogy is evident. What does it prove? First of all—and we are tenacious on this point—it in no way calls in question the originality of an artist so sincere and personal as Pierre Louys. There has recently been pointed out<sup>1</sup> the close kinship which connects *Aphrodite* and the *Chansons de Bilitis* with certain airy and charming works of the eighteenth century, notably the *Temple de Guide* of Montesquieu. It would not be difficult to trace in the works of Pierre Louys the influence which that pagan age of sensuality and libertinism has had upon the most accomplished of our story-tellers. In the range of our realist and romantic literature, the author of *La Femme et le Pantin* belongs more directly to the line of the Crébillons, Laclos, Lesages, Moncriffs, than to that of the neo-classicists, to whom he is sometimes assigned. The stupendous energy of the senses, the varied activities of the body, the practised, or entirely animal, concord of caresses, the perpetual, exclusive pre-occupation with woman and love—these are the essential ideas which rule his work; they are of those for which personal observation alone does not suffice in treatment; there is needed as well a richer and more various “documentation.” A story-teller of such a stamp is necessarily a scholar as well; and this one feeds and strengthens his other

<sup>1</sup> R. Frêne, *Bilitis, Aphrodite, et Le Temple de Guide*, in the *Mercur de France*, March 15, 1907.

## LEGRAND DE BEAUVAIS

inspiration by a sure and detailed knowledge of the classic literatures. Nor are the eighteenth-century memoirs less familiar to him than is the Greek Anthology. His curiosity and sympathy turn manifestly, not to the patient, attentive, yet artificial labours of the purely imaginative writers, but to all those works which accurately reflect the multiform life of an epoch or a man. Thus everything in the character of a confession, or autobiography, or *journal intime*, whether it be the Dialogues of Lucian or the Memoirs of Casanova, is of particular interest to him. Has he not penetrated quite recently to the secret of the mysterious manuscript of Legrand de Beauvais? What surprising discoveries, what racy revelations, may we not hope for from this enormous collection of personal documents and confidential letters. from this *Histoire des femmes que j'ai connues*, which the author, by concealing it under the dense veil of an ingenious cipher, seems to have wished to keep virgin for a mind which could appreciate and understand it! If out of this huge mass of indiscreet prattle there is to issue one day, from the vivid pen of Pierre Louys, some more subtle artistry in the form of words, the enigmatic memoirs of Legrand de Beauvais will not have been written in vain. Even Casanova's borrow a fresh interest and a new, peculiar value from the story which they have inspired, and which we have essayed to trace to its source.



## **CHAPTER VI**

### **THE TEXT OF THE MEMOIRS**





## CHAPTER VI

### THE TEXT OF THE MEMOIRS

A new edition of the *Memoirs*—The Odyssey of an Odyssey.

#### I. History of the editions.

Carlo Angiolini and the manuscript—The fragments in *Urania*, and the German translation—The translation of the translation: the Jung and Aubert de Vitry edition—The corrections of Laforgue: the "*princeps*" edition—The Cosson, Paulin, Méline, Rosez, and Garnier editions.

II. Two different texts: the Rosez and Garnier editions compared—Questions of dating—The Saint-Germain and La Charpillon episodes—A pastel and a miniature—Two ends to the same adventure.

III. A regrettable lacuna: a night in Madrid—Story of a strange lady, a secret door, and a corpse—Why Casanova was incarcerated at the *Buen-Retiro*.

Need for a definitive edition.

It seems very likely that we are at last to have, not a new edition of the *Memoirs* of Casanova, but *the* edition—the first accurate and complete one of a work whereof the original has been fated to undergo almost as many vicissitudes as was its author.

A strange mystery long surrounded the origin of these

## CASANOVA AND HIS TIME

*Memoirs*, whose very authenticity has frequently and authoritatively been disputed. Yet nothing, to-day, is clearer or better known than their history. In recalling it briefly here, after Brockhaus, Armand Baschet, Uzanne, Symons, and some others, our purpose is not to give a new version of it, but to explain the dubious and mutilated form in which Casanova's text has reached us, and to show how necessary it is to present that text in a state of scrupulous conformity with the original manuscript.

### I

It was in 1820, more than a score of years after Casanova's death, that Carlo Angiolini brought to the publisher Brockhaus at Leipzig the manuscript of the *Memoirs*. It bore as title: *Histoire de ma vie jusqu'en l'an 1797*,<sup>1</sup> and consisted of twelve bundles, written in Casanova's hand on thick yellowish paper of official shape. There is but one lacuna: chapters four and five of the twelfth volume are missing, and must have been subtracted by the author himself, with the intention of correcting or re-writing them.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See F. A. Brockhaus, *Catalogue complet des publications depuis 1805 jusqu'à 1872*, pp. 176, 177; and F. A. Brockhaus, *sa vie et ses actes*, II. 336-343.

<sup>2</sup> So says Arthur Symons, *Casanova à Dux*, in the *Mercure de France* of October, 1903. A. Symons found, in Casanova's MSS. at Dux, an

## THE ORIGINAL MANUSCRIPT

This manuscript, the actual original of the *Memoirs*, which has been known for nearly a century, and has never ceased to be the property of intelligent and well-informed publishers, *has not once been published word for word*, and all the versions given of it to this day have been either shamefully mutilated or stupidly travestied. And it is perhaps a unique circumstance in the history of letters that there should on every occasion have been forthcoming some one complaisant or unscrupulous enough to alter, through ignorance, timidity, or deliberate choice, the odyssey of a life so rich and so informing.

The earliest in date of these editions, though it in no way merits the name of the "original" one, is a German translation made by G. von Schütz, of which some fragments were at first published, by way of an historical curiosity, in the review, *Urania*, in 1822. Later, this translation appeared in twelve successive volumes issued by the house of Brockhaus from 1822 to 1828. But this publication, as the

*Extract from Chapters IV. and V.*, written on paper similar to the rest; this bundle contained forty-four sheets, and, despite the title of "Extract," appears to comprise nearly all the matter of the missing chapters, notably the continuation of the story of Armelline and Scholastica, which was interrupted by the hasty finishing of Chapter III. In the definitive edition of the *Memoirs* we shall hope to see these chapters take their place. Every one who has been to Dux and seen Casanova's papers agrees about the interest of these MSS.: see L. Herbert in the *Neue Freie Presse* of June 10, 1868, and an anonymous article in the *Gazette d'Augsbourg* for June 26, 1875, under the title, *Böhmische Wanderungen*.



## CASANOVA AND HIS TIME

German title indicates,<sup>1</sup> contained only fragments of the original text—and this cannot be too often repeated, for some of the French editions which followed the German one contain the same omissions and errors. In giving only certain extracts from the famous *Memoirs*, the publisher had his reasons and his scruples, which at that time were legitimate, though no longer admissible to-day; for only twenty-four years after the death of the writer, and still ablaze with so many and so varied passions, these pages, in their brutal candour, were all too likely to offend modesties, awaken hatreds, and wound vanities. There was some wisdom and much prudence in the decision of the publisher. But it would perhaps have been better to wait, and publish at that time none of Casanova's text, than to send forth so soon this deceptive and imperfect version, source of all the errors and chimæras which have since been perpetuated.

The consequences were speedy. In fact, the German translation had scarcely begun to appear when there emerged in France another edition, the translation of a translation, a work of no originality nor interest, due to the collaboration of Jung and Aubert de Vitry.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Aus den Memoiren des Venetianers Jacob Casanova de Seingalt.* The erotic passages had been carefully suppressed, for fear of the censor.

<sup>2</sup> Published in ten volumes, 12mo, Tournachon-Mollin, 1825. The three first volumes are translated by Jung, the seven others by Aubert de Vitry.

## LAFORGUE'S VERSION

Matters stood thus, and the entire text was still unknown, when there occurred absolutely the most fatal incident of all undergone by the *Memoirs*. Anxious to offer the public as quickly as might be the actual work of Casanova—that is to say, the French text written at Dux—the publisher Brockhaus conceived the regrettable idea of commissioning a Frenchman to revise the text, to attenuate its freedoms, its effronteries of thought and style, and to correct its supposed flights of language.

This work of disorganisation, as unskilful as it was valueless, took place while the German translation was still in course of publication—between 1822 and 1826—and had for author a certain Jean Laforgue, Professor of French at Dresden. All those who have been able to see the manuscript and compare the text with what was published through the lucubrations of the Laforgue, are unanimous in protesting against such treachery. Examples taken from Casanova's version, and compared with that of his unforeseen collaborator, have been given :<sup>1</sup> they all attest the profound incomprehension, the vapidity, the incompetence of the botcher ; they all awaken regret that exaggerated scruples should have induced the publisher to deliver up the manuscript to his mercy. Now, it is his personal morality, his modesty, which takes fright at too bold a reflection, and

<sup>1</sup> For example, by Arthur Symons, in the article referred to.

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therefore attenuates its import; now, his pedantry which is vexed by an original and racy figure; now, his ignorance which is baffled by an historical detail. Symons declares that he hardly found three consecutive phrases intact. There was already a German translation of the French original; what Jean Laforgue did was to make a French translation of it—and an unfaithful one, at that.<sup>1</sup>

Nevertheless, the edition which resulted from these labours ranks, for the present, as the *princeps* one, as being, in default of something better, the nearest to the manuscript. It took twelve years in appearing—from 1826 to 1838—is in twelve volumes, corresponding with the number of bundles of MS., and bears successively the names of three different publishers.<sup>2</sup>

Most of the subsequent editions either reproduce Laforgue's text, or are even more regrettably inspired by the translation of Jung and Aubert de Vitry, or take still further liberties with the manuscript. Among the principal ones which appeared between 1830 and the present day, we

<sup>1</sup> A. Baschet, in his *Preuves curieuses, etc.*, is far too indulgent towards Laforgue's "corrections."

<sup>2</sup> Vols. I. and II. (1826), and III. and IV. (1827), Brockhaus, Leipzig, and Ponthieu, Paris; Vols. V., VI., VII., and VIII. (1832), Heidelhoff et Campé, Paris; Vols. IX., X., XI., and XII. (1838) were published at Brussels, without other indication. The last volumes, instead of being published in Paris, appeared at Brussels, for fear of the French censorship.



## SUBSEQUENT EDITIONS

may cite those of Cosson, Paulin, Méline, Rosez, and Garnier.<sup>1</sup>

The most popular of these, and the editions in which nearly everybody has read the *Memoirs*, are the Rosez and Garnier.<sup>2</sup>

Now there are, between these two, divergences so considerable that it is difficult to regard them as versions of the same work. Anybody who has read the *Memoirs* in the text of the one will scarcely recognise them in the text of the other; and we give here some curious examples of these strange discrepancies, to demonstrate once more our need to possess not *another* text, but *THE* text, of Casanova.

### II

It is generally known that the MS. of the *Memoirs* terminates abruptly with the year 1774, and not with that of 1797, as the title would lead one to suppose. Thus they are, properly speaking, not finished; and the author, who was

<sup>1</sup> The Cosson edition, Paris (1830), is incomplete, and contains only the two first volumes; the Paulin, Paris (1833-1837), is in ten volumes octavo, and in 1843 was reprinted in four volumes 12mo; the Méline, Brussels (1883), has ten volumes 18mo, but is incomplete; the Rosez, Brussels (1860-1863), appeared in six volumes 12mo, then was republished (1871) in six volumes octavo; finally, the Garnier, Paris, appeared at first (1879) in eight volumes octavo, and in 1880 in eight volumes 18mo.

<sup>2</sup> The Rosez edition has been quite recently reprinted, with no change in the text, by the house of Flammarion.



## CASANOVA AND HIS TIME

probably interrupted by illness or death in his work of revision,<sup>1</sup> deserts us without ceremony in the full current of events. At the moment of this abandonment he was at Trieste, where he had retrieved a woman whom he had loved at Milan—Irène Rinaldi.

Here are the last lines of this last chapter, as given in the Garnier edition<sup>2</sup>—

“Irène left Trieste at the beginning of the Carnival with the company to which she belonged; I met her again three years later at Padua, with her daughter, who had grown into a charming girl, and with whom I renewed my acquaintance in the most tender fashion.”

In the Rosez edition,<sup>3</sup> the text is thus travestied—

“She left Trieste with all the company *towards the middle of Lent*. The reader will retrieve her *five years later* at Padua, at the time of my intimate relations with her daughter . . . *mater pulchra filia pulchrior*.”

The reader perceives that upon at least two points, and

<sup>1</sup> Dr. Guède supposes, with some plausibility, that Casanova, who, after his restoration to favour in Venice, in 1774, had become the secret agent of the Inquisitor's tribunal for the Home Department of Venice, was reluctant to acknowledge that he had been a spy for seven years, and that that was why he voluntarily cut short his narrative at the year 1774. Armand Baschet thinks that the missing volumes spoke too freely of the Count von Waldstein and of Casanova's life at Dux, and were destroyed as a measure of discretion.

<sup>2</sup> Vol. VIII. 443.

<sup>3</sup> Vol. VI. 446.

## DISCREPANCIES

two points of fact, the two texts sensibly differ. And this discrepancy is the more striking in a matter of dating, because in general the chronology of the *Memoirs* is scrupulously correct, and the facts are almost everywhere in accordance with the dates.<sup>1</sup>

The manner in which, according to the particular edition, the death of Saint-Germain is announced, gives us a fresh instance of these discrepancies. "He died *six or seven years ago at Schleswig*," says one.<sup>2</sup> "I *afterwards* learned that the famous charlatan had died in *Silesia*," says the other.<sup>3</sup> And we believe we have shown that one at least of these two affirmations is a gross error.

The facts relative to the various encounters of Casanova and Saint-Germain are almost identical, in other respects, in the two versions. But here is a fragment of which it is the more astonishing to find variants because it is not a piece of Casanova's own prose, but a letter from Saint-Germain given by Casanova in his narrative:—

<sup>1</sup> This correctness has been demonstrated by a series of minute observations made on the whole text of the *Memoirs* by Dr. Guède.

<sup>2</sup> Garnier, VII. 73.

<sup>3</sup> Rosez, VI. 79.

## CASANOVA AND HIS TIME

*Rosez edition:*<sup>1</sup>

“My occupations oblige me to refuse all kinds of visits, but you are an exception. Come then : you will be at once admitted. Only, do not give your name to my servants. I do not invite you to share my board : it would not suit you, particularly if you have preserved your old appetite.”

*Garnier edition:*<sup>2</sup>

“My occupations oblige me to receive no one, but you are an exception. Come at whatever hour suits you best ; you will be conducted to my room. You will not need to mention either my name or your own. I do not offer you the half of my dinner, for my food could suit no one, and least of all *you*, if you still preserve your old appetite.”

On other points, the discrepancies accentuate themselves : the episode of La Charpillon, notably, which we have made the subject of a special study, presents the most curious contrasts.

The epoch at which this adventure took place, as Casanova himself remarks, was one of the turning-points of his existence, for amid the trouble and disillusionment of that fruitless passion he felt the first advancing chills of decadence and old age. Here are the solemn terms in which he makes this avowal ; the interesting details of the two texts are worth comparing :—

<sup>1</sup> Vol. VI. 76.

<sup>2</sup> Vol. VII. 71.



## DETAILS OF TWO TEXTS

*Rosez edition :*<sup>1</sup>

“I have noted this epoch, September, 1763, as one of the crises of my life. Veritably it was from that time that *I felt myself grow old*. *I was only thirty-eight*; but if, in the ordinary course of nature, the descending line may be measured by the ascending one, I think that I may count *to-day* (1797) on four years of existence at most; and those will go rather quickly, by virtue of the maxim :

“‘Movement accelerates towards the end.’”

Here is absolute conformity between the dates and chronological indications, but there are certain greater or lesser exactitudes, according to the edition, which are sufficiently striking, and of which one would be glad to know the origin.

And now let us savour these two portraits of La Charpillon, identical in essence, it is true, but resembling one another as little as do a pastel and a miniature of the same person :—

*Garnier edition :*<sup>2</sup>

“It was towards the end of September, 1763, that I made La Charpillon’s acquaintance, and it was on that day that *I began to die*. If the perpendicular line of ascent is equal to the line of descent, and as *to-day is the first of November 1797*, I feel that I may count on about four years longer of life, and they will pass very quickly, according to the maxim : *Motus in fine velocior*.”

<sup>1</sup> Vol. VI. 6.

<sup>2</sup> Vol. VI. 484.



## CASANOVA AND HIS TIME

*Rosez edition :*<sup>1</sup>

“La Charpillon, then known by all London, and perhaps still alive, was a rare and finished beauty: *chestnut hair, eyes of azure blue, skin of dazzling fairness, slender figure, neck and shoulders of voluptuous fulness, exquisite hands, tiny feet, and scarcely seventeen years old.* I have never seen a more deceptive countenance. Nature has never lied more impudently than in that face, which expressed so much candour and innocence.”

*Garnier edition :*<sup>2</sup>

“La Charpillon, who was known to all London, and who, I believe, still lives, was one of those beauties in whom it is difficult to discover the smallest physical defect. *Her hair was of a beautiful light chestnut colour, and of astonishing length and luxuriance; her blue eyes had both the languor natural to that hue, and the full brilliance of an Andalusian woman's; her faintly rose-tinted skin was of dazzling fairness, and her tall form promised to have, at twenty, the slender grace of Pauline's. Her shoulders were perhaps a shade narrow, but of perfect modelling; she had white, soft, slim hands, a little longer than most people's, together with the prettiest feet, and that stately and graceful movement which can make even an ordinary woman charming.* Her sweet, open face was the soul of candour, and seemed to promise all that delicacy of feeling and exquisite sensibility which are ever irresistible weapons for the fair sex. In these points alone, Nature had been pleased to lie.”

<sup>1</sup> Vol. VI. 7.

<sup>2</sup> Vol. VI. 485.

## DIFFERENT ISSUES

Visibly, the first portrait—that of the Rosez edition—is more austere in drawing, the touches are more precise, the lineaments soberer. Are we to hail, in the second, the bombastic verbosity of the Laforgue? At all events, two details arrest attention: *neck and shoulders of voluptuous fulness, become, a little narrow, but of perfect modelling;* and then the indication of age, *scarcely seventeen*, is radically suppressed.

We have also noted some amusing variants in the two narratives which follow this portrait: in the bath-scene, the artifice of the dressing-gown and the armchair, in the promenade at Richmond, the texts differ considerably. But we may not enter into details, and we shall confine ourselves, before abandoning this episode, to pointing out how different is its issue, according to the edition in which one reads it.

It will be remembered that Casanova, after having been twenty times fooled and baffled by a creature whom, despite all, he desired, was cured of this passion by the most unforeseen and banal of occurrences—he meets, at a pleasure-resort, dancing the minuet in gay company, her whom he believed to be dead, and for whom he had been on the point of dying. This encounter, and the beneficent disillusion which ensued, give birth in the Garnier edition to overblown flowers of oratory—our hero spares us no reflection nor apostrophe. He takes refuge in an alley where he can

## CASANOVA AND HIS TIME

abandon himself at leisure to philosophic meditations, with which he lavishly presents us. In the Rosez edition, the end is much simpler and more natural; there is no declamation and no philosophy; a single phrase terminates the encounter.

“To push aside the spectators, walk straight up to La Charpillon and address her, was the affair of an instant. *I do not know what I said to her, but she fled, terrified.*”

Here again there is in this text not only greater conciseness, but greater verisimilitude, than in the other.

### III

Apart from these divergences, which might be explained by hasty or erroneous reading, by personal fancy, or by a mere copyist's error, but which are none the less regrettable and disconcerting, there are often in one of the editions, as compared with the other, considerable lacunæ. All who have read the *Memoirs* in the Rosez edition will certainly have present in their minds the tragic and mysterious adventure of which, in Madrid, Casanova was the hero, in company with an unknown lady.<sup>1</sup> The narrative, in the sequence of events, comes between the love-affair of our Venetian with Doña Ignacia, and his arrest, followed by detention at the Buen-Retiro prison.

<sup>1</sup> Rosez edition, VI. 228-232.



## THE MADRID ADVENTURE

Casanova had been interested at first, and then ravished—for he took all his amorous fevers very badly—by the enigmatic manœuvres of a lady whose windows were exactly opposite his own. One evening, as he was pondering on what way to get into the lovely stranger's house, a blind moved, and a small white slender hand came out, which dropped at his feet a key and a note. 'Tis Seville itself—'tis Beaumarchais in full blast ! . . . But no ; for the rakish comedy brusquely changes to the most sombre of dramas. Armed with his key, and following the instructions of the note, Casanova penetrates at midnight by a little door into the silent old building. He is awaited. Beside him rustle feminine garments, and some one takes him by the hand. He goes submissively. Arrived in the chamber of the fair unknown (he calls her Dolorès), he flings himself at her feet, and believes that his moment of felicity is come. She, grave and ardent, exacts promises, which he heedlessly lavishes. The bed, hung with curtains, is faintly seen in the shadow at the far end of the room. Passionate Casanova is easily led thither ; then the fair one pulls the curtains violently aside, and the corpse of a young man, half-naked, is seen upon the disordered couch.

“This cavalier was my lover,” says the lady ; “he deceived me, and I have killed him.” And exacts from her guest, bound by his vows of a moment ago, that he shall rid her



## CASANOVA AND HIS TIME

of this body by throwing it into the river. Casanova had sworn; he was too honourable to fly, and too well seasoned to be over much astounded by such an unexpected issue. But of all his adventures in love, surely this was the most original and dramatic. Behold him, in the middle of the night, in a town where he knows he is already surrounded by suspicions, bearing on his shoulders, in obedience to an unknown woman from whom he has not even had a kiss, the blood-stained carcase of a man whom he has not killed! He acquits himself with difficulty of his gruesome task, returns home in a state of inexpressible confusion and terror, thinking now of only one thing—how to leave Madrid at once. The next day he is arrested.

There are in this story all the materials for a “well-made mystery-novel,” and the subject has not perhaps been entirely neglected. How are we to account for the fact that so striking an episode is not to be found in the Garnier edition? How, if it is authentic, did it escape the editors? and how, if it is interpolated, has it been so adroitly adjusted to the course of the narrative? For not only does it fit in perfectly, but in these events one can find the unavowed pretext, if not the direct cause, of the arrest and detention which form the close to this part of the *Memoirs*.

In the Rosez edition the adventure of the unknown lady

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## CASANOVA ARRESTED

comes between the adieu to Doña Ignacia and the arrest. In the Garnier edition, it is totally suppressed, and there is nothing between the adieu and the arrest but this phrase : “ *The next day* I dined with Mengs, and *the day after that*, at four o’clock, an ill-looking man accosted me in the street.”<sup>1</sup> So that evidently it is in that *next day* so hastily passed over that all the mystery resides. Going by the Garnier edition, Casanova was arrested on the accusation of the harbour-authorities of being concerned in “gun-running.” But a stranger who warned him of the danger that threatened, added on his own account this valuable detail : “The Alcade knows, or thinks he knows, *several other things* which authorise him to seize you and send you to prison.” The same pretext, same warning, same detail, are also found in the Rosez edition, in almost the same terms. But may we not see in the strange nocturnal adventure which we have related, one at least of those secret reasons which justified the arrest ?

In effect, every time that Casanova had these quarrels with the police—in Venice, England, France, and Spain—he did not himself know very well, at the moment of arrest, of what precise misdemeanour he was to have to give an account ; and that is why, in his purposely confused narrative, these rigorous measures oftenest show as either

<sup>1</sup> Garnier edition, VII. 414.

## CASANOVA AND HIS TIME

incomprehensible or arbitrary. The gambler and debauchee, the bully, cabalist, and swindler,—he was each and all by turns—had a conscience incessantly burdened with more than one peccadillo, and when the authorities could by any means fasten somebody's else as well on his shoulders, they were not loth to do so. It would certainly seem that that was what happened to him in Madrid, with his tragic, fair stranger.<sup>1</sup>

The examples which we have just given, and which it would not have been difficult to multiply, clearly prove that we do not possess a really complete and correct text of the *Memoirs*. That the two best-known editions should present such wide discrepancies can surprise nobody who considers the strange conditions in which this work has been edited so far, the mutilations it has undergone, the arrangements of all sorts to which it has been subjected. It is well, moreover, to point out that these divergences between the two texts become more marked as we reach the end of the book, and that the earlier volumes are very often in

<sup>1</sup> The suppression of this curious episode is not the only lacuna to be found in the Garnier edition as compared with the Rosez. A whole chapter, the sixteenth in Vol. IV., is abruptly "cut" at the end—in the Rosez edition, Casanova's intrigues with Mme. Zeroli at this period are more fully given.



## PLEA FOR A PURE TEXT

accordance on nearly every point. But there persist, none the less, serious dubieties in the narrative as a whole.

If, as we hope we have established, a real documentary value may be attributed to Casanova's *Memoirs*—if we may claim for them, at any rate for the history of manners and society, some of those qualities of the human document which learning and criticism are unwise to neglect, it is important that we should possess a text free from all spot and blemish of personal fantasy. What we want to know, what we need to consult, is not the more or less arbitrary interpretations of an editor or adapter, but the very words of the subtle and erotic Venetian. His life, one perpetual carnival, was little more than a continued travesty; but the *narrative* of his life should no longer be enveloped in the same mystery. The hour is come to pull off the impenetrable mask whose ironic smile concealed a personality of profound and genuine human interest.





## APPENDIX I



## APPENDIX I

### CURIOUS AND LITTLE-KNOWN DOCUMENTS RELATIVE TO SAINT-GERMAIN.<sup>1</sup>

IN addition to the sources we have ourselves indicated, the following works on Saint-Germain may be consulted with advantage :—

Fr. Bülow, *Geheime Geschichten*. Barthold, *Die geschichtlichen Persönlichkeiten in Casanovas Memoiren*, II. 44–99. Charles de Hesse, *Mémoires de mon temps*. London Chronicle, 1760, p. 532. Lamberg, *Mémorial d'un mondain*, 1775, p. 80 *sqq.*; p. 100 *sqq.* *Tablettes fantastiques*, 1782. Voltaire, *Œuvres*, Beuchot edition, LIII. 333; LVIII. 360, 390. Hanssen, *Chronik von Eckernförde*, 60. Der deutsche Herald, 1893, n° 10. Schleswiger Nachrichten, 1893, Aug. 31. D. Thiébault, *Mes souvenirs de vingt ans de séjour à Berlin*, Paris, 1804, vol. V. p. 96.

<sup>1</sup> For all these documents we are indebted to the kind communications of M. Louis Bobé and M. Tage E. Bull.



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Extract from *Mémorial d'un mondain*, by Count Maximilian von Lamberg :<sup>1</sup>

A rare type is the Marquis d'Aymar, or Belmar, known under the name of Saint-Germain. . . .

The King, in giving him Chambord on the death of Maréchal de Saxe, embraced him at parting ; and Saint-Germain was seen in the best houses, and, I would go so far as to say, as a distinguished guest. He often went to the Princesse d'Anhalt's, mother of the present Czarina. "I must indeed enjoy finding myself in your company, Princess," he said to her, "to forget, as I have done, that my carriage has been waiting two hours to drive me to Versailles."

For the rest, no one knows who this singular man is ; he is believed to be Portuguese ; he has a thousand talents rarely found in a single man ; he plays the violin like a master—listening to him from behind a screen, one seems to be hearing five or six instruments played together. . . .

Saint-Germain claims to have taught Wildmann the secret of domesticating bees, and of charming snakes by song and music. . . .

I have transcribed a very interesting letter, which he wrote me from Mantua in 1773 :—"I saw Wildmann at the Hague, when I was arrested there ; I insisted, before giving up my sword, that I should be granted an interview with M. d'Affry, French Ambassador to the Republic. I was driven there in my carriage with the officer charged to watch over my person ; the Ambassador received me as though surprised to see me, but soon

<sup>1</sup> Obtainable at Cape Corsica, and also at Frankfort-on-the-Maine, J. G. Esslinger, 1775, p. 100 *sqq.*

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ordered the guard to retire, specially charging him to advise the burgomaster that, as I enjoyed the protection of the King, I was under His Majesty's safeguard so long as I should remain in Holland."<sup>1</sup>

### *Saint-Germain and the Secret of Louis XV.*

Voltaire's *Correspondance*; letter to the King of Prussia of April 15, 1760.

M. le duc de Choiseul, M de Kaunitz, and M. Pitt tell me nothing of their secret. Rumour has it that it is known only to a certain Monsieur de Saint-Germain, who once upon a time had supper with the Fathers of the Council of Trent, and who will probably, in half a century, have the honour of seeing Your Majesty. . . . He is a man who does not die, and who knows everything.

Frederic II. answers bluntly that *le comte de Saint-Germain était un conte pour rire.*

### *Saint-Germain in Paris.*

In 1757, Saint-Germain frequented the house of Count Erhard Wedel Frijs, Danish Minister in Paris, and it was there that Count Andreas Peter Bernstorff met him with some

<sup>1</sup> This curious story, which is in flat contradiction to that contained in Casanova's *Memoirs*, seems to us worthy of scant credence. Saint-Germain had some powerful friends in Holland, Count Bentinck Van Rhoon among others. It was he, and not Cornelis Calkoen, as Casanova

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frequency. Count Bernstorff, in an unpublished letter, speaks in disdainful strain of the famous alchemist, whom he calls an adept and a miracle-monger :

“I was neither his friend nor his admirer, and I hope he has forgotten how genuinely piqued he was at my aloofness, but twenty-two years have slipped past since then. . . . Now I suspend judgment, but I admit I am ever disposed to mistrust a man whose credentials have always been concealed, and who has constantly been responsible for the most ridiculous assertions ; a man who constantly changes his name, figures one day as adept and the next as my Lord Bountiful, lavish dispenser of the particular beneficence of Providence.”

### *Saint-Germain in England.*

Extracts from the *London Chronicle* or *Universal Evening Post*.

*Friday, May 2nd*—The Hague, April 26th.—A certain Comte de Saint-Germain, who has been much talked about for more than three months, has disappeared. The States-General granted a warrant of arrest against him on the demand of a neighbouring power. He has fled to London, the common depository of Rome and of Paris.

reports, who gave Saint-Germain timely warning of his imminent arrest. He procured him a passport and had him driven in his own coach to Hellevetsluis. The Minister of the English King had supplied him with a blank passport, and Bentinck filled in Saint-Germain's name.



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May 3-6.

*Monday, May 5th.*—The Comte de Saint-Germain, mentioned in our last issue as having arrived here from Holland, is a foreigner to whom the King of France has granted asylum in his dominions. Finding that the freedom with which he there spoke of public affairs bade fair to compromise him, he left Paris and went to Holland, where he declared himself to be entrusted with the most secret negotiations between France and the Republic. M. d'Affry presented an official note demanding his arrest and transfer under safe escort to Antwerp, prior to being taken to France. But the pretended count got wind of the affair in time to flit to England.

May 8-19.

*Friday, May 9th.*—The personage who passed in Holland as the Comte de Saint-Germain, and who arrived recently in England, has been discovered at his London lodging and confided to the guardianship of one of His Majesty's police-officers.

May 13-15.

*Wednesday, May 14th.*—The author of the *Gazette de Bruxelles* informs us that the personage who entitles himself Comte de Saint-Germain, and who recently arrived here from Holland, was born in Italy in 1712. He speaks German and French as fluently as Italian, and expresses himself passably in English. He has a smattering of all the arts and sciences; is a good chemist, a musical virtuoso, and, at the same time, an eminently agreeable companion. In 1745, his position was much compromised in



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England : some one who bore him a jealous grudge on the score of a woman, slipped a letter purporting to come from the young Pretender (thanking him for his advice and praying its continuance), into his pocket, and then had him forthwith arrested by a police-officer. His innocence being completely established on examination, he was set at liberty and invited to dine by Lord H. "Those who knew him will be sorry to learn," says M. Maubert, "that he has incurred the displeasure of the Most Christian King."

May 24-27.

*Monday, May 26th.*—Rotterdam, May 18th. The Comte de Saint-Germain, set at liberty in London, has arrived here ; while still in prison he had numerous interviews with the Lords of the Privy Council, which open a still more vast field for conjecture. (*Gazette de Bruxelles.*)

May 31 to June 3.

*Monday, June 2nd.*—Anecdotes about a mysterious stranger.<sup>1</sup> A good many years ago he was in England, and since that epoch he has travelled over several other European kingdoms, always sustaining his reputation as a man of fashion, and as invariably living on his credit.

He had unfailing skill in discovering the prevailing weakness of the place where he was about to settle himself, and built thereupon his scheme for courting popularity. When he came to England, quite a long time ago now, he saw that music was the whim of the hour in that country, and set himself to play

<sup>1</sup> A long article of which we give only some extracts.

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the violin with so much grace as almost to rank him as "a native player," as our poet would have said. In Italy, where the feeling for Art is dominant, he proved himself a connoisseur of jewels, antiquities, and medals. In France he was a dandy ; in Germany, a chemist.

June 28 to July 1.

*Monday, June 30th.*—We learn from Paris that several distinguished persons having interested themselves with the king on behalf of the Comte de Saint-Germain, who has got himself so much talked about, His Majesty was on the point of pardoning him, when it transpired that the Count was a spy of the King of Prussia at the Court of France, and his agent with Madame de Pompadour.

August 21–23.

*Friday, August 22nd.*—We learn that the famous Comte de Saint-Germain, who was here a short time ago, has taken up his residence at Altena.

*Saint-Germain in the Duchy of Schleswig.*

Letters from Frederik Carle von Warnstedt, Danish Statesman (1750–1811).

Schleswig, *November 24th, 1779.*—We can also boast possession of the famous adventurer Saint-Germain—that is to say, the most thorough charlatan, buffoon, mountebank, *windbeutel* (wind-bag), and, in some aspects, knave, who has flourished for many

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years. Our prince, true to the marked predilection for such gentry for which he has always been distinguished, esteems and honours him with all his strength and all his heart. He does three hours' lessons with him every morning. I hope that the Court physician will provide himself with effective remedies to purge all the gas which His Most Serene Highness now swallows with such confidence. In spite of his passion for all the human race, this Saint-Germain has no love for the town of Copenhagen, and will not go there. The explanation of this is, Count Bernstorff's having known him for long years at Paris for what he is.

*December 11th, 1779.*—I have passed two evenings with this famous Saint-Germain. I am as firmly persuaded that he is a thoroughgoing adventurer and charlatan as I am of my own existence. However, he is a man of burning imagination, which may cause him occasionally to include himself among his own dupes. He is full of intelligence and information, true and false, but infinitely fuller of presumption, pride, and self-love, unusual in its excess. I believe he has no religion, but is a materialist, another La Mettrie. For my part, I am strongly inclined to believe him a Portuguese or Spanish Jew, to judge by his features and a certain indecision in his pronunciation. The Prince lends himself to incredible absurdities with this man. He does not say that he is more than eighty-six years old. But I am wrong to speak ill of him, for he bears me much love.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Letters published by L. Bobé in his *Papiers inédits de la famille de Reventlow, 1770-1827* (Copenhagen, 1903), pp. 600, 601.



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Extract from *Épisodes de ma vie*, by the Comte d'Angivillier (1730-1809).

I was acquainted with M. de Saint-Germain, who was made such a favourite of by Prince Charles. I was quite young, but in spite of my youth, and though treated by him with kindness and even affection, I was so far from leaving him in peaceable enjoyment of the homage which was rendered to his charlatanism, that I incessantly insulted him, quite regardless of discretion.<sup>1</sup>

Letter from Count Maximilian von Lamberg to J. F. Opiz :<sup>2</sup>

M. de Saint-Germain lived a considerable time in Paris. People could talk of no one else. He used actually to say that he was four hundred years old. I was very curious to see him. One day I met him at the house of the late Princesse de Talmond. I observed him and listened to him attentively. He seemed to me very cultured and very amusing. That evening, at a house where I was supping, I published my good fortune. I said that I had seen the famous Comte de Saint-Germain. I was asked if it was true that he was four hundred years old, as he affirmed. "I believe," I answered coolly, "that he is deceiving people; he does not appear to be more than two hundred." For the rest, this celebrated adventurer, who seems to have passed a good part of his life in playing on the credulity of men, is to be commended for his knowledge and talents. To

<sup>1</sup> The *Épisodes de ma vie* are inserted in vol. vii. of the work by M. Bobé already cited, pp. 195, *sqq.*

<sup>2</sup> Johann-Ferdinand Opiz, Austrian man of letters (1741-1812).



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say that singularity is his only merit falls short of fact, and to believe that his reputation has no other basis would be to wrong him. His travels and researches would furnish curious and useful material to a writer who thoroughly knew his ground.

Epigram written by Count M. von Lamberg on Saint-Germain :—

J'ai CCC ans dans mon histoire ;  
J'en ai CC pour mes amis ;  
J'en ai L où il faut boire ;  
J'en ai XXV avec Iris.  
Sans être néanmoins à tous ses dons rebelle,  
La fortune de moi ne fait point son hochet.  
Je ne fus jamais son jouet,  
Car c'est moi qui me jouais d'elle.

Epitaph written by Saint-Germain for Count M. von Lamberg—

Citoyen vertueux, pleure un sage mondain,  
Ami de Dieu, des lois, de César, du prochain ;  
Lamberg mourut sans or, mais non pas sans mérite.  
Las d'éclairer les sots que la lumière irrite,  
Le destin voulant faire un acte d'équité  
Légua son nom chéri à la postérité,  
Son corps étique aux vers, son cœur à la patrie,  
A l'amitié son âme, aux Muses son génie.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> These two epigrams and the letter from Lamberg to Opiz, taken from an unpublished correspondence recently discovered at Prague, have been

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communicated to us by M. Tage E. Bull. They came into his hands from a learned Austrian, M. Gustave Gugitz, who is now engaged in summarising the correspondence between Count Maximilian von Lamberg and J. F. Opiz, which is full of curious information about Casanova, Cagliostro, and Saint-Germain. M. G. Gugitz is the author of exhaustive studies on *Casanova in Vienna and in Switzerland*. We tender to him, as well as to M. Tage E. Bull, all our thanks for their kind and valuable communications. Maximilian-Joseph, Count von Lamberg, Baron von Ortenegg and von Ottenstein, was successively Chamberlain to the Emperor of Germany, Privy Councillor and Governor of the Palace to the Duke of Würtemberg, and Privy Councillor, Minister Plenipotentiary and Grand Marshal of the Palace to the Prince-Bishop of Augsbourg.



## APPENDIX II





## APPENDIX II

WE have thought it well to collect here some documents concerning the *Memoirs* of Casanova. The majority of these fragments, which are forgotten or little known, serve to complete our study, or to throw light on certain passages of it.

### LETTER FROM CASANOVA TO AN UNKNOWN LADY

[published in *L'Intermédiaire des chercheurs et des curieux*, April 25, 1880, pp. 235-237, under the signature: (Bordeaux) Ego E. G.].

"This letter was written by Casanova in 1797, from the Castle of Dux (in Bohemia), where he was living, to one of his most charming fair correspondents, who had asked for a motto for her portrait. The foreign newspaper which printed this copy nearly ten years ago, was careful to point out that it was taken straight from the original, at the foot of which there appeared the following pencilled note: *Giovanni Jacobo Casanova de Saint Gall* (sic), *Aventurier*, 1725-1803."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> In contradiction to what is claimed by the author of this communication, the date of death is fictitious. To-day it is clearly established that

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*To Madame . . .*

MADAME,

The order with which you honoured me, on the 4th of this month, has occupied me daily. But nothing which my pen has produced has satisfied me, and I cannot therefore tender aught worthy of you. The superb prose, of which you have commissioned me to distil the quintessence, is the sublime subject of a Platonic Ode, and seeing that it is itself a quintessence, how should I have an alambic in my laboratory capable of extracting the quintessence from the quintessence? A motto, Madame, fit to be inscribed beside your portrait, and to indicate your thought to the reader, can only be a phrase from Plato, or, should you not desire it in Greek, from some Latin Platonist, or be it Italian, if you love the Italian tongue. Such would be the three verses which Petrarch puts into the mouth of Laura, restored after her death to that same third heaven which she had left to be born amongst us. I am sure, Madame, that you deem it impossible for your soul to be immortal without having enjoyed a previous existence, and I can assure you that, although this system is not mine, for I think the idea of *identity* absurd, and consider the senses inseparable from their organs, I admire it none the less, and respect the profundity of the minds which adopted it, and have the strength to follow it. Certain as I am that all which exists is indestructible, I dare swear that if my soul existed before me, it will exist after me; but not as one with me, for it could not have been one with me before matter

Casanova, born in 1725, died in 1798, a year after this letter. (See particularly on this point, *Intermédiaire*, Nov. 20, 1894, p. 537.)

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formed my body. There, in a word, Madame, is the difference between you and me. You believe yourself immortal in soul, and, according to Socrates, you are so already, since you *live for the future*. I believe myself mortal in body, and I am so ; but I felicitate my soul if, in virtue of being a real substance, it proves to be immortal, and I regret my inability to witness that immortality, because my senses can only remain inseparably attached to my body, which decays instant by instant until death, "*ultima linea rerum*," comes to claim possession of it.

Seneca, in one of his letters, reproaches a learned friend of his with cruelty for having undermined his belief in the immortality of his soul, which he had believed able to remain identified with his sense-perceptions after his death. He complains that his friend has deprived him of a hope, which he calls "*mentis dulcissimus error*." I entreat you, Madame, not to believe that I want to imitate Seneca's friend ; God forbid that I should set myself the task of disabusing you, all the more because I cannot myself swear to being free from delusion. I confess that I know nothing about it ; and that if to be conscious of my immortality I needs must die, I am in no hurry to attain the knowledge of the truth in question. A truth which costs one's life costs too dear ; but if, after my death, it chances that I remain a sentient being, never will I admit that I am dead. As for you, Madame, I can but congratulate you on your metaphysical outlook, since only as a consequence of your virtues can it have taken root in your spirit, and it must contribute to your growth in grace. But you must forgive me if I am unable to desire the accomplishment of your desires, if so be that you are longing to enjoy a bliss which you can only expect from death. Death is a monster that I



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detest, since his function is to destroy my reason, which I am bound to cherish, principally because without it I should have had no acquaintance with a great part of your merits.

Here are the three superb verses which Petrarch, the greatest of the Italian Platonists, puts into the mouth of the dead Laura, whose soul has already returned to its own sphere. She addresses him thus :—

Mio ben non cape in intelletto umano ;  
Te sol qui aspetto, e quel che tanto amasti,  
E là giuso é rimasto, il mio bel velo.

After these three lines, see how the great poet of Love finishes the sonnet, which is held to be the most beautiful of those composed by him after the death of his divinity. Notice, Madame, that in his vision she appeared to be speaking to him, holding his hand in hers :—

Deh ! perchè tacque, ed allargo la mano ?  
Che al suon di detti sì pietosi e costì  
Poco manco che non rimasi in cielo.

Observe again, Madame, that he admits the resurrection of the beautiful Laura's body, which had been reunited to her soul, as she herself had hoped. In his triumph over Death, speaking of her corpse, he created a line which, by its sensibility and divine harmony, often wrings tears from me when a fleeting ray of youth sets sparkling the wine of emotion. Here is this heavenly line :—

Morte bella pareo nel suo bel viso.

He says in another charming sonnet :—

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O delle donne altero, e raro mostro !  
Or negli occhi di lui che tutto vede  
Vedi il mio amore, e quella pura fede,  
Per cui tanto versai lacrime, e inchiostro.

In fulness of respect and admiration, Madame, I have the honour to be—

Your most humble servant,

CASANOVA.

## II

### AUTHENTICITY OF AN EPISODE OF THE MEMOIRS

(The child of Della Croce.)

[From an article by Doctor Guède, *Intermédiaire des chercheurs et des curieux*, November 20, 1894, pp. 548 to 551.]

In the course of the narrative [of the *Memoirs*] a young Italian, a gambler, swindler, and profligate, is mentioned several times, as may be seen in the 2nd, 5th, and 6th volumes. Casanova calls him Croce, Santa Croce, Della Croce, Lacroix: he met him at Reggio, Padua, Spa, everywhere that the world goes to gamble and recoup its fortunes. He adored this young man, seeing in him a reflection of himself. The last time he met him was at Spa, where the Marquis de *Santa Croce* was playing the great personage, after having ravished at Brussels a young girl of seventeen, whom he had rendered *enceinte*. For all his tricks, the rascal had lost everything:

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baggage, jewels, money, down to his last halfpenny. He had to flit, or blow his brains out; he chose the first alternative, and confided his mistress to Casanova, who brought her to Paris. But here is the story : we are in the year 1767.

“I took her to the midwife, for she had fallen into a swoon. On October 13 she had a violent attack of fever, which from that day never left her. On the 17th she was brought to bed of a boy, whom I had baptised on the morrow. She wrote down herself the names he was to bear : Jacques-Charles, son of Antoine Della Croce and of Charlotte de L.

“For some reason which I failed to understand, she demanded authoritatively that the midwife should herself take the child to the Enfants-Trouvés, with its birth-certificate wrapped in its swaddling-clothes. In vain I adjured her to leave her son with me. She obstinately refused, reiterating, ‘Croce will come to look for his son, and will find him.’

“On the same day, the midwife sent me a certificate of admission to the Enfants-Trouvés, given on October 20, 1767, by J. B. Dorival, Councillor to the King and Commissary of the Châtelet. If any one is curious to know the name of the mother, here is their opportunity.

“From that moment Charlotte’s fever redoubled; she became delirious on the 24th, her death-agony commenced in the evening of the next day, and at 5 o’clock in the morning of the 26th she died in my arms.”

The temptation to verify this was irresistible. I made



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application, and, some weeks later, received from M. Peyron, Director of Public Administration, the following letter :—

“I have had a search made for the name of the child mentioned in the note which you addressed to me, and I have the honour to inform you that the search has been fruitless.”

This answer caused me but little surprise. Casanova, in “embroidering” a dénouement on a little drama of real life, had been anxious to display himself in the white light of self-denial and purest devotion. Closing it by the woman’s death, how could any one accuse him—voluptuary though he was, and with no prejudices at all in favour of delicacy—of having wished to take advantage of a sick, despairing child, about to become a mother ?

He was conscious enough of his reputation for immorality on various counts to be glad to put a weight in the other scale. Moreover, I was bound to suspect an invention : real people are not called Dorival ; the name smacks of Marivaux—it is like a lover’s name in a comedy, just as soldiers are called La Tulipe, servants Lafleur, and huntsmen La Ramée.

But, on second thoughts, it occurred to me that the Public Administration has more important things to do than to satisfy the curiosity of an investigator, and that it was quite possible I had received nothing more than a polite official evasion. Then I recalled a friendly acquaintance : M. d’Ec . . . , not only a high official of the administration, but a cultured writer, sculptor,



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painter, and connoisseur. I interested him in the investigation, and received from him a letter authorising me to make a *personal* and exhaustive search in the registers.

When I pronounced the name of the Della Croce child, the keeper of the archives replied that he had made a search for that identical child a short time before. This answer, which compelled me at the outset to make the *amende honorable* to the sincerity and courtesy of the administration, at the same time shattered my last hope. Nevertheless I set myself to search personally, but without success: Della Croce, Santa Croce, Delacroix, La Croix . . . when all of a sudden, on a line lower down, two names made my eyes positively start out of my head. They were Jacques-Charles (the very ones I wanted!) preceding the name of Lacrosse. Here is the inscription and the registration:—

### *General Index of the Matriculation-books of the Enfants-Trouvés.*

4871.—LACROSSE (Jacques-Charles).

There are two documentary references to this child.

4871.—Extract from the baptismal register of the parish church of Saint-Laurent in Paris, the 18th day of October of the year 1767.

Was baptised, Jacques-Charles, born yesterday, son of Antoine La Crosse, citizen of Paris, and of Charlotte Lamotte, his father and his mother [word illegible], Faubourg St. Denis, of this parish.

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Compared with the original and delivered by me, undersigned priest, head curate of the aforesaid parish of Saint Laurent, Paris, October 18, 1767.

FINET.

4871 *bis*.—By order of myself, Jean-Baptiste Dorival, Councillor to the King, Commissary of Investigation, Examiner to the Châtelet of Paris, late Police-Superintendent of the City Quarter, there has been admitted to a cot in the Enfants-Trouvés of this city, there to be supported and educated in the customary manner, a child, *boy*, apparently *one day old*, *who was brought to us from the Rue du Faubourg Saint-Denis, by Mme. Lamarre, certificated midwife, dressed in his swaddling-clothes, in which was found a certificate that this child was baptized to-day in the parish of Saint-Laurent as Jacques-Charles, son of Antoine Lacrosse and Charlotte Lamotte, the which child has been left at the aforesaid institution, which undertakes the charge of him to the effect aforesaid.*

Made and delivered at our residence, *this eighteenth day of October, 1767, seven o'clock p.m.*

DORIVAL.

The words *italicized* are written in ink, the remainder is printed after the manner of the official prepared forms in current use.

Now, how did Della Croce become Lacrosse? Simply enough. It was the system to begin by suppressing the “de” in the case of foundlings, as folk ill-adapted to be burdened with the particle. So in the case in question, Mlle. de Lamotte becomes

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Lamotte and De la Croce becomes la Croce, which, as pronounced in French by the midwife and the *employé*, begets Lacrosse.

Thus we have now, in addition to the word-for-word text of Casanova's narrative, the name of the priest as well as the name and address of the midwife.

"Croce will come and look for his son, and will find him ;" so poor Charlotte had said. Knowing this worthy gentleman, we were saved the effort of wondering if the rascal ever gave a thought to the matter ; but it was interesting to know what might have become of the child.

The following document informs us :—

83<sup>rd</sup> Register of the *Enfants-Trouvés* (from 4.484 to 6.007.—3rd part).

4871 *bis*.—Jacques-Charles Lacrosse, newly-born, admitted on an order from Commissary Dorival on October 18.

Of Paris. Died October 31, 1767.

Moral : Make your investigations yourself.

Doctor GUÈDE.

### III

#### BIBLIOGRAPHICAL FRAGMENT

We reproduce here, by way of a bibliographical hint, a list of some pamphlets which have appeared in Italy relating to Casanova and his *Memoirs*. Investigators will find them worth consulting.

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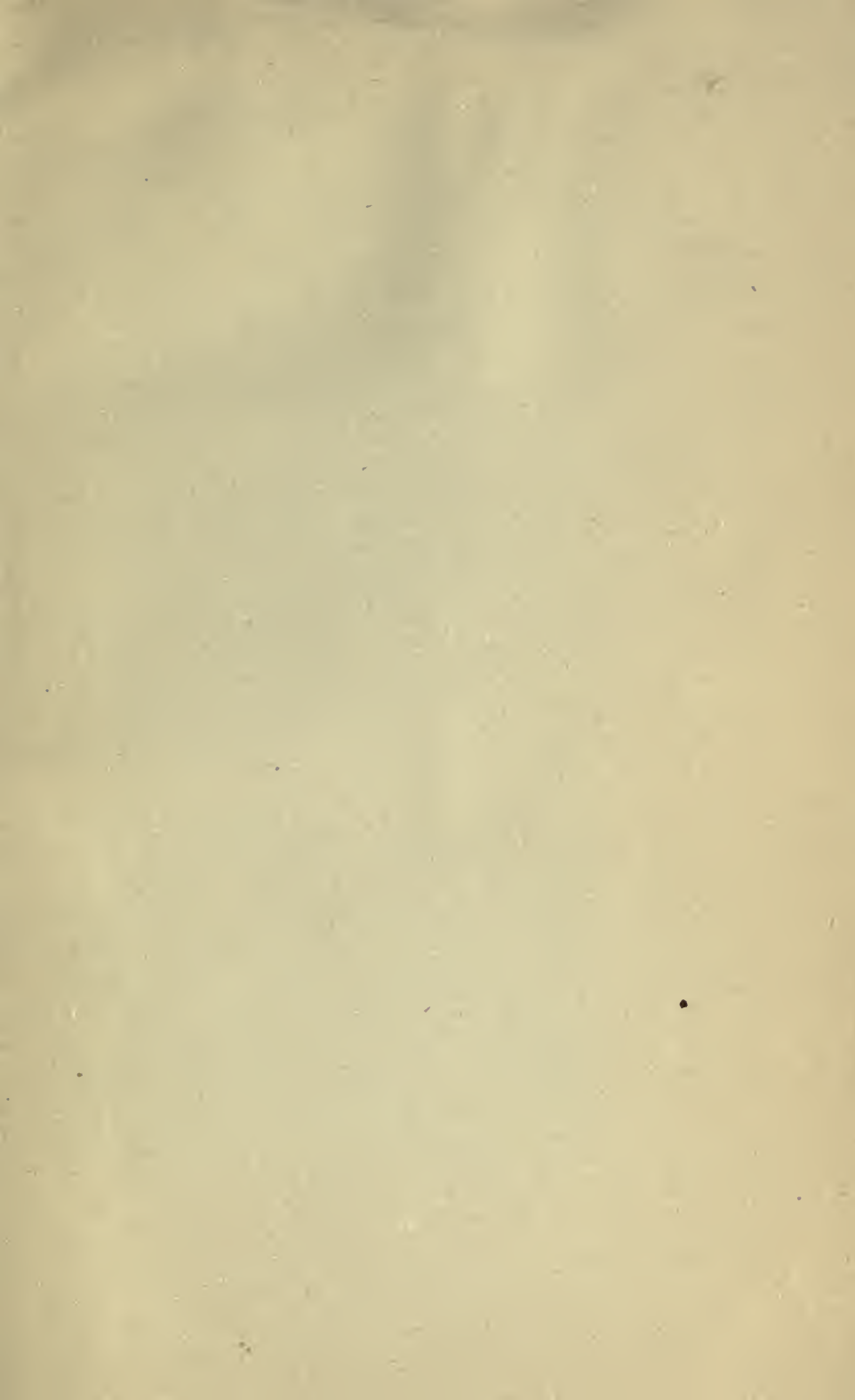














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